



City of Westminster

Children, Environment and Leisure Policy and Scrutiny Committee

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| Title: | Annual Looked After Children and Care Leavers Report 2016-17 |
| Report of: | Helen Farrell |
| Cabinet Member Portfolio | Councillor Richard Holloway, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People |
| Wards Involved: | All |
| Policy Context: | City for Choice / Heritage / Aspiration |
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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report highlights the significant responsibilities the local authority has in relation to Looked After Children and Care Leavers, and how it discharges these.
- 1.2 Generally, outcomes for looked after children across the UK are poorer than those who have not been in the care system. Despite the good work and dedication of professionals and carers, challenges still remain in improving the experiences and outcomes for looked after children. Locally, we closely monitor the profile and outcomes of our care population in order to effectively plan services. Section 4 of this report outlines the profile of our current care population and Section 5 focuses specifically on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs). Section 6 highlights Westminster's strategic priorities for looked after children services and future developments in services and Sections 7-11 highlight outcomes for looked after children and care leavers.
- 1.3 This report is for information.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 In this report, the term Looked After Children refers to those children for whom Westminster City Council has assumed Parental Responsibility through a care order, by an agreement with their parent(s) or for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs).
- 2.2 Westminster also has a duty and responsibility to those young people who leave care after the age of 18 years until they reach the age of 25 following the legislative changes that were introduced within the Children and Social Work Act 2017. Previously the duty was until 21 years for care leavers not in education.
- 2.3 The majority of looked after children need alternative care and accommodation due to the inability of their primary care giver to offer safe and effective care within the family home. Many looked after children are able to return to their parent(s) or extended family members speedily and do not require long term services or interventions. Many who remain in care are likely to have suffered neglect or abuse, prior to coming into our care, and are likely to require support from a range of services including into adulthood.

3. Corporate Parenting

- 3.1 Corporate Parenting is the term used to refer to the collective responsibility of the Council to provide the best care and protection for children and young people who are 'looked after', that is, who are in public care. Effective corporate parenting will need the commitment from all Council employees and elected Members and an authority wide approach. These responsibilities for Local Authorities were first laid out in the Children Act 1989, subsequently in the Children Act 2004 and the Children and Young People's Act 2008 and most recently in the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The most recent legislation sets out seven corporate parenting principles that all Councils must adhere to for children in care and care leavers to ensure that their needs are met and life chances promoted.
- 3.2 The Corporate Parenting Board has a key role in monitoring how the Council discharges its corporate parenting responsibilities. Over the past year the Board has continued to meet with looked after children and care leavers on a quarterly basis and at other celebratory events such as the Education Awards Ceremony, Christmas Party, a summer BBQ and a residential camp. Consultation topics are highlighted in Section 10.

4. Numbers of Looked After Children

- 4.1 Nationally, there were 72,670 children and young people in care on 31 March 2017, compared with 70,440 at the same point in 2016. This represents a 3%

increase. This national figure remains the highest figure of children in care since the implementation of the Children Act 1989.

- 4.2 Between 2009-2016 the number of looked after children within Westminster has steadily declined, from 247 children in March 2009 to 166 in March 2016. However, with 182 looked after children at March 2017 this represents a 10% increase when compared with the same point in 2016. An increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children self-presenting accounted for this rise which will be examined in detail within this report. The number of children looked after as a proportion of the population in Westminster City Council is around 43 LAC per 10,000 population. This is lower when compared to our statistical neighbours and nationally (where the ratio is 60 per 10,000).

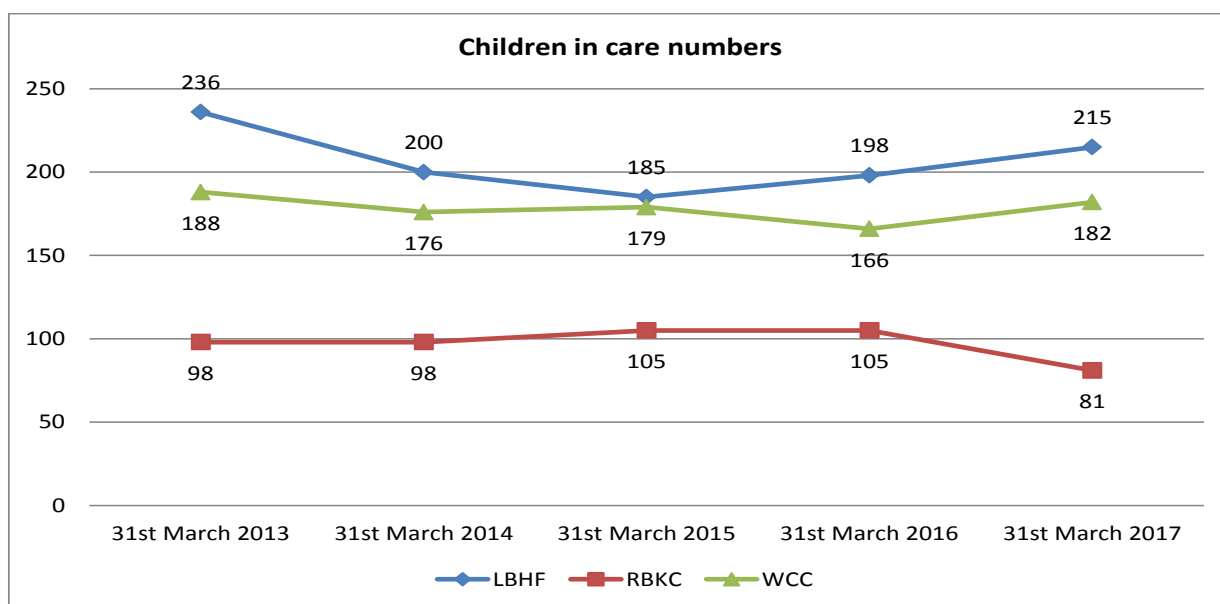


Table 1: Looked After Children population (year-end): 2012/13-2016/17

- 4.3 The majority (144, 79%) of Westminster looked after children at 31 March 2017 were aged 10 and over which represents an increase from 127 children (77%) at the same point in 2016. With 69 (38%) children aged 16 and above and 75 aged 10 to 15 (41%) of the total children in care population. Only 18 looked after children were aged under 5 years (8 aged under one and 10 aged between one and four). The low numbers for children aged under 5 years is attributed to care proceedings reaching timely permanence decisions, those with an adoption care plan being placed in adoptive families without delay and the successful interventions that are provided to support parents to implement changes in family life and children are remaining with their families.
- 4.4 The increase in Westminster children in care numbers during 2016-17 is largely attributed to a rising number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) that have presented in Westminster during the year. The large number of presentations has continued to rise since 1st April 2017. In contrast during 2016-17 the number of Westminster citizen looked after children and children subject to child protection and child in need plans has remained stable. Between April 2016 and March 2017, 46 new unaccompanied minors aged 14 to 18 years

became looked after by Westminster and claimed asylum (plus one subsequently assessed to be an adult) compared with 25 during the same period in 2015-16. This represented 32% of the new care entrants in this year compared to 26% in 2015-16 and contributes to the number of looked after children being aged 10 and over. Section 5 considers unaccompanied asylum seeking children in greater detail.

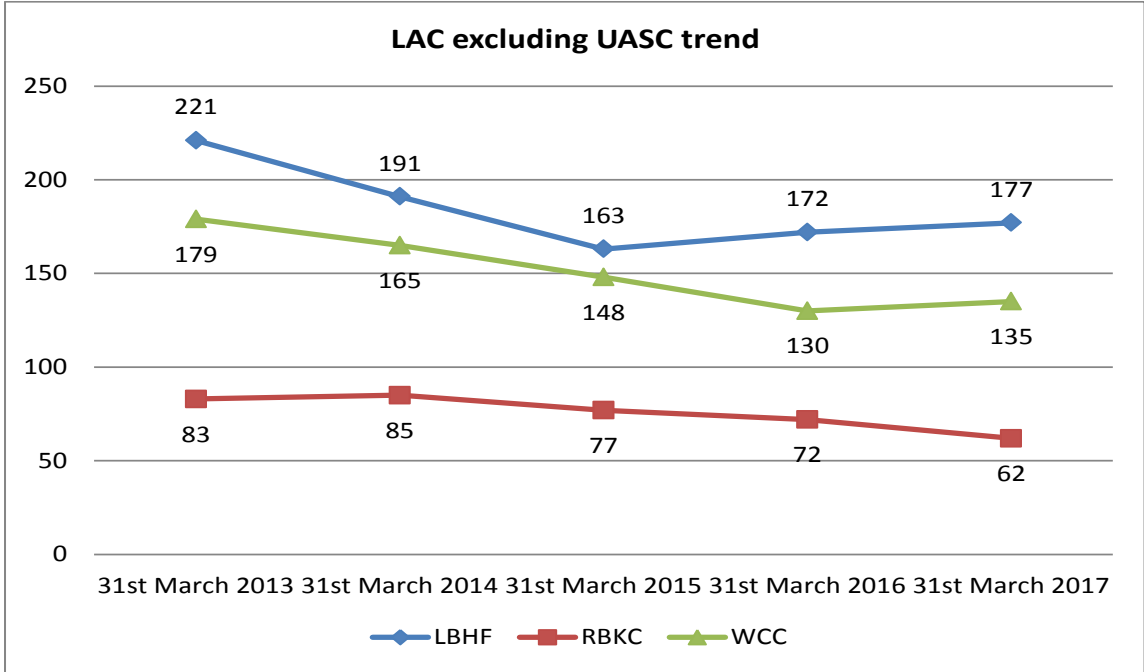


Table 2: Looked After Children population (year-end) excluding UASC: 2012/13-2016/17

4.5 The chart overleaf provides a breakdown of the reasons for new care episodes for 14-17 year olds during 2016-17. This cohort represents 71 young people up from 49 young people for the same period in 2015-16, of which the highest proportion (65% up from 50% in 2015-16) were classified as UASC. Safeguarding/Family breakdown resulted in 20 (28%) children entering care which is also slightly higher to the previous year's data for Westminster citizen adolescents. A significant proportion of this cohort does not remain looked after longer term and return to live again with their families following interventions being provided to address conflict and dynamics.

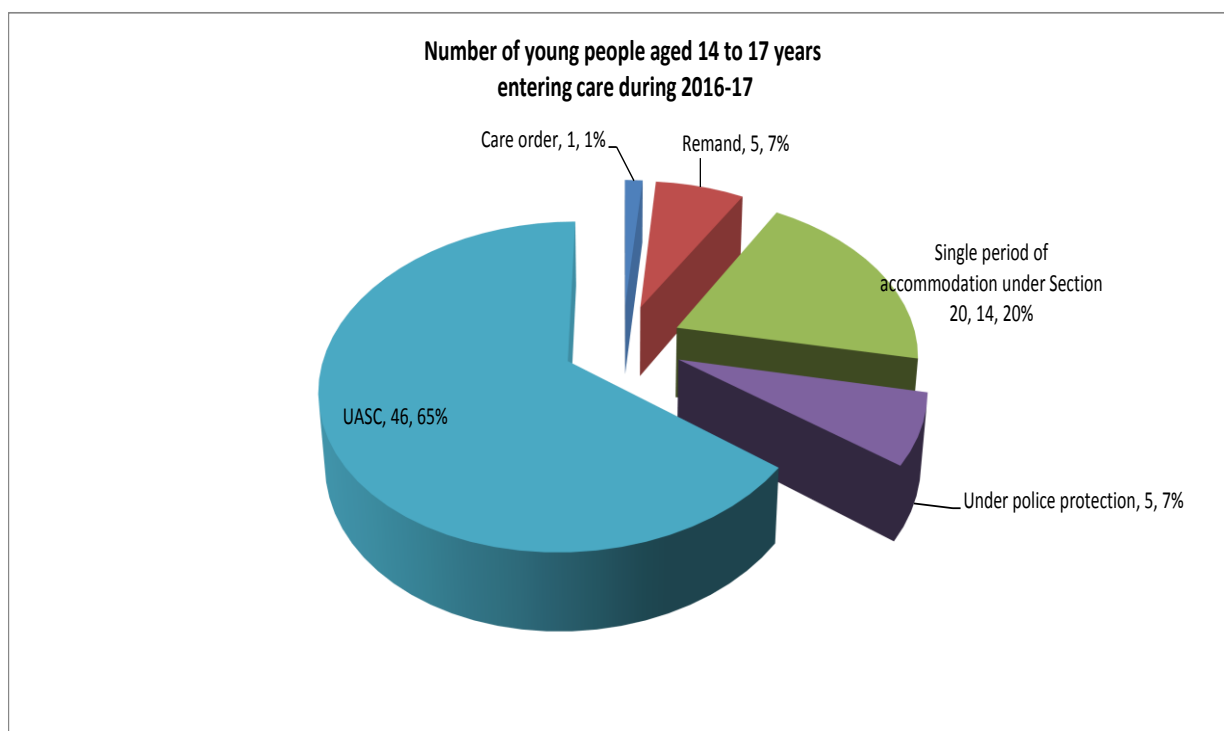


Table 3: Breakdown of reasons for care entries during 2016-17

5. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

- 5.1 Within Westminster there has been a significant increase in the number of new UASC care entries during 2016-17 (46 young people) particularly in the weeks following the dismantling of the Calais camps. This is in addition to the existing UASCs that were already being cared for by Westminster. Our numbers of UASCs has doubled over the last 2 years impacting our overall care population. Nationally there has been an increased UASC population from 1,950 in 2013 to 4,560 in 2016.
- 5.2 There is no dedicated budget for UASC and former UASC care leavers within Westminster. Instead, provision is funded through mainstream Looked After Children budgets which are offset by the Home Office grant allocation for UASC. The Home Office grant received only covers a portion of Westminster's overall costs for UASCs and the projected total unfunded costs equates to £563,709 (including UASC Care Leavers) for 2017-18.

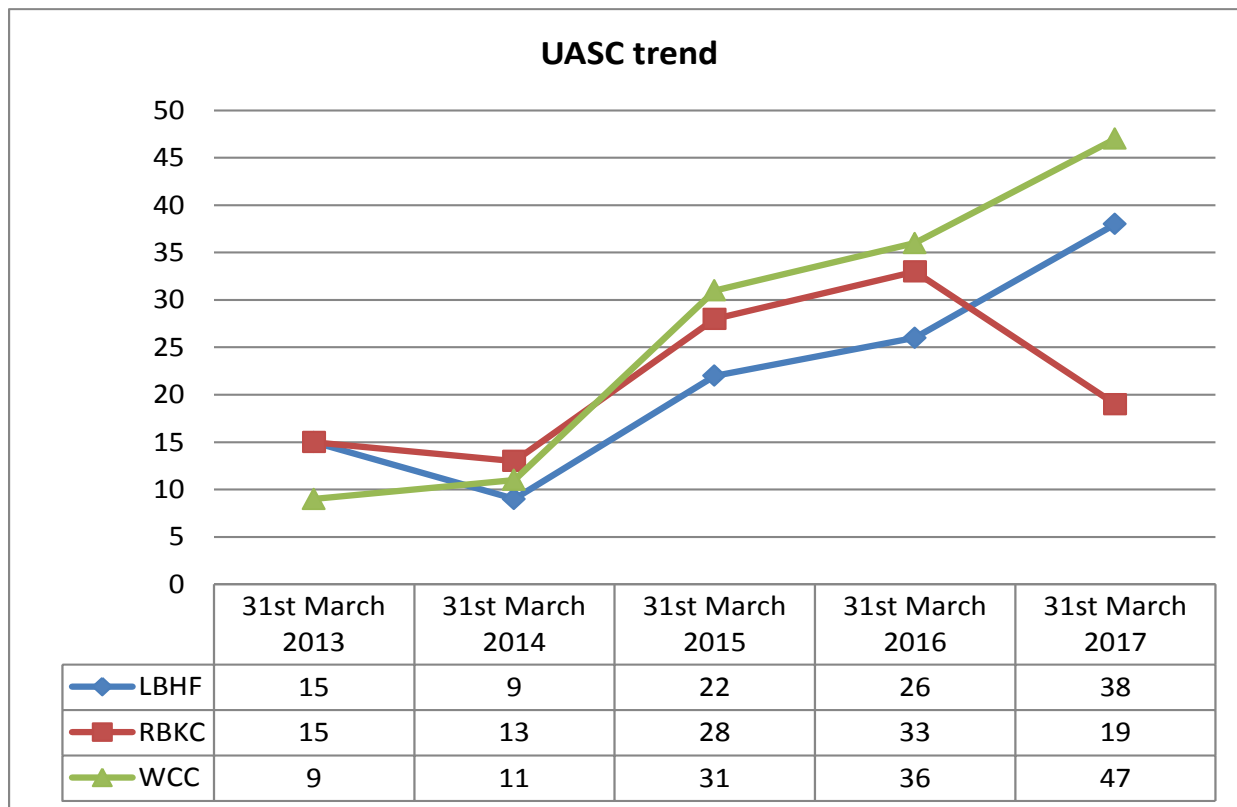


Table 4: UASC Numbers at 31 March 2013-2017

- 5.3 Westminster currently has 57 UASCs in their care (as at September 2017). The Council's National Transfer Scheme (0.07%) threshold is 28 UASCs and we have remained over numbers throughout the year. Westminster only becomes eligible for accepting on-going responsibility for new UASCs when those already permanently in our care turn 18 years, are deported or go missing which results in going under threshold numbers. Although Westminster is over its threshold we are legally required to assess, support and accommodate UASCs who present until the transferring authority assumes responsibility.
- 5.4 Although the introduction of the National Transfer Scheme was intended to more evenly distribute UASCs between the local authorities rather than primarily within London and the South East. The challenges faced by Westminster have included the high influx of self-presentations associated with central location, that some UASCs specifically choose to present here hoping that they can remain in borough, that some refuse to move out of London even when alternative authorities have been identified for them and the delays in some authorities taking over responsibility. Throughout 2016-17 there has been regular telephone and face to face communication with the Home Office to address these issues and raise any concerns about the scheme. Whilst there have been some improvements with the functioning of the scheme and the length of time it takes for new authorities to be allocated, this continues to be offset by the continued high volume of UASCs presenting in Westminster and the overall time that it still takes for a new UASC to fully transfer to a new authority. A dedicated UASC team has recently been developed on a temporary basis within the Assessment and Assessment Service to address this demand

and to ensure that one team focuses upon newly presenting UASCs, their move on and communication with other authorities in order to reduce delays within our control.

- 5.5 There is notable consistency in the age of UASC on arrival with the vast majority (98%) aged between 15-17 years. Given the age trends the UASC population has a significant bearing on Westminster's care leaver numbers and associated budgets. This greatly impacts on staffing and placement costs that the Council bears as a result of the much lower grant allocation for adults that is available from the Home Office. In 2016-17 49 (30%) of Westminster's care leavers were former UASCs compared with 42 (25%) in 2015-16. A significant number of UASCs, particularly those from Albania, are ultimately unsuccessful in their claims for asylum into adulthood and in some cases this has a bearing on UASCs going missing as a means of avoiding deportation. Former UASC care leavers continue to be supported by the Leaving Care Service whilst they await a final decision by the Home Office in line with our statutory obligations. The age of those awaiting a decision ranges from 18 to 24 years old.
- 5.6 During 2016-17 there has been a notably shift in the country of origin for new UASC care entrants presenting to Westminster. Over a number of years, Albanian young people accounted for the majority of UASCs and we also saw a large number of children from Afghanistan arrive. In contrast during the last year the majority of new UASCs have originated from Sudan and Eritrea. This is set against the London trend where Albanian and Vietnamese children were the highest volume of newly arrived UASCs.
- 5.7 UASCs experience a range of physical and emotional difficulties as a result of prolonged journeys in insanitary conditions with inadequate supplies of food and water and/or what they might have been subjected to in their home countries prior to leaving. The effects of separation, bereavement and uncertainty about their families' wellbeing and own immigration status can have a negative emotional impact on UASCs. These range of needs are addressed through their LAC Health Assessments and involving LAC CAMHS.

6. Strategic Planning

- 6.1 A Tri-borough strategy for Looked After Children continues to be implemented and sets out the vision and intended outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers in the three boroughs in the period 2014 to 2017.
- 6.2 The current strategy has six strategic objectives:
- Children on the edge of care are better supported to remain within their families and community
 - Looked After Children and Care Leavers are provided with security, stability and are cared for
 - Looked After Children and Care Leavers are safe from harm and neglect

- Looked After Children and Care Leavers are supported in reaching a good standard of education
 - Looked After Children and Care Leavers health needs are promoted and supported
 - All Looked After Children and Care Leavers have a voice in decisions which affect their lives.
- 6.3 To support the delivery of the strategic priorities, and progress towards shared outcomes, an annual borough specific Looked After Children and Care Leavers improvement plan is developed and delivered with partners including Health, Education and the Youth Offending Service. The plan is monitored and further developed through multi-agency service improvement groups, which link directly with the Corporate Parenting Boards and Children in Care Councils and are able to respond to the issues and recommendations that children and young people make within consultation work and related activity.
- 6.4 The Children, Sport & Leisure Policy and Scrutiny Committee is also involved in monitoring the quality and effectiveness of services, via the scrutiny of this annual report on services and outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. A report on the work of the Tri-borough Fostering and Adoption Team is also presented annually with a focus on the range, quality and choice of available placements.
- 6.5 Other relevant performance indicators are reported quarterly through the Family Services Management Group and then to the Cabinet Member via weekly Cabinet Briefings.
- 6.6 Preparations are underway in advance of implementing changes arising from the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which come into effect in April 2018. The key elements specific to children in care includes extending corporate parenting duties to care leavers up to 25 years irrespective of educational status, including the allocation of a Personal Advisor, introducing corporate parenting principles that Councils must adhere to, producing and advertising a Local Offer that outlines care leaver entitlements and extending the advice and support provided by virtual schools for children previously looked after but now placed for adoption or special guardianship orders. Although we are awaiting formal guidance to be issued by the DfE, projections have been completed regarding the increased number of care leavers that will remain open or potentially return requesting a service and the associated impact on placement costs and staffing. A consultation will be completed with children in care and care leavers regarding the Local Offer, their views on needs, priorities and gaps and platforms for publishing this. These changes have been introduced to take account that adults that have previously been in care are some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in society. Extending the duties and support to older care leavers seeks to take account of this and also acknowledges that children raised within their families typically continue to seek parental advice and support for a number of years as they navigate early adulthood.

7. Safeguarding Outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

- 7.1 Children who are subject to frequent placement moves are less able to form positive attachments with carers which makes them more vulnerable to forming unsafe relationships with other adults or their peer group and disengagement from education and positive activities. The number of placement moves that children have is carefully monitored to ensure plans are adapted and additional services introduced to make placements more resilient where required. In 2016-17, 5% (8 children) of looked after children experienced three or more placement moves, a decrease on the previous year where there were 11% (18 children) of children with three or more placement moves. Performance for 2016-17 significantly exceeded the national average of 11%. In 2016-17 there was a 12% increase to 87% of under 16s remaining in the same placement for at least 2 years which further evidences on-going progress in achieving placement stability. Westminster has made continued progress in these areas when compared with Tri-Borough colleagues.
- 7.2 As a geographically small borough, not all looked after children are able to live within Westminster when they are in care. However, there are significant efforts at both the local and national level to reduce the distance at which looked after children are placed from their borough of origin. While there are a small minority of children who are more effectively safeguarded by being placed at a distance such as those young people identified to be at risk due to gang affiliation or child sexual exploitation (CSE), the consistent lack of foster placements in Inner London means that many children need to be placed in other local authority areas, although usually these are within London. Of the children and young people looked after at 31 March 2017, just under 80% were placed in London boroughs, including 20 children within Westminster, and 69% of children placed in foster placements were placed with Tri-Borough in-house foster carers. This represents a 23% improvement compared to 2015-16 performance and positively impacts both practice, experience for the children and placement costs. Additionally, there are currently 16 care leavers who continue to live with foster carers under a “staying put” arrangement, an initiative which enables care leavers to continue to live in their foster placement when they become young adults to support them with their transition to living independently. We also have 21 looked after children placed with relatives who have been assessed as kinship foster carers, thus enabling these children to reside with their extended family. In addition, 39 children are placed with relatives under Special Guardianship Orders as an alternative to long term fostering or adoption outside the family. The number of children placed for adoption from Westminster rose slightly from four to nine compared with the previous year, against a continuing national reduction of adoptions outside the extended family.
- 7.3 Looked after children are at greater risk of going missing than their peers due to their turbulent life experiences, and are therefore vulnerable to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). Children with frequent placement moves, more fragile

attachments and late care entrants are more likely to go missing and this behaviour in turn impacts upon the stability of any new placements. There was a total of 150 missing episodes regarding children in care during 2016-17, which includes a small number of individual young people who had frequent repeat missing episodes. A robust process is in place that ensures management oversight and that missing children are visited and interviewed in order to address any potential safeguarding issues that the child may be encountering either within or outside the placement.

- 7.4 With specific reference to children at risk of CSE there continue to be a number of monitoring and practice systems in place to identify those assessed to be at risk and to provide a comprehensive support package to ensure that risks are reduced. This includes monthly Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) meetings chaired by the Police and Children’s Services, a shared risk assessment tool, a common pathway to services coordinated through the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), clear data sets and problem profiles, a range of training and awareness-raising initiatives and a CSE lead practitioner based in the Integrated Gangs Unit who undertakes direct work with those assessed to be at risk of CSE and gang related activity.
- 7.5 Currently Westminster has a total of 37 children identified at risk of CSE and these children are categorised following an assessment regarding how serious the risk and evidence is. The majority of children in Westminster are within the blue category whereby they have been assessed as potentially vulnerable to CSE but with no actual evidence of CSE taking place. With specific reference to looked after children there are currently nine children assessed to be at risk of CSE – 3 in Category Blue, 4 in Category 1 and 2 in Category 2. The number of looked after children assessed to be at risk of experiencing CSE has continued to increase during the last two years. This relates to improved identification of risks, assessment and interviewing skills and clearer CSE mapping. During 2016-17 5 girls were proactively brought into local authority care because of CSE and missing concerns and their families struggling to safeguard them.

| Westminster | BLUE | Cat 1 | Cat 2 | Total |
|--------------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| CIN | 8 | 3 | 0 | 11 |
| CP | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| LAC-3B | 2 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| LAC-OB | 1 | 4 | 1 | 6 |
| Other | 5 | 8 | 1 | 14 |
| Grand Total | 18 | 16 | 3 | 37 |

Table 5: Current CSE Data highlighting children in care

- 7.6 Under the Care Act 2014, implemented in April 2015, local authorities now have a duty to conduct transition assessments. This is where there is a likely need for care and support when the young person turns 18 and when that assessment

would be of significant benefit. Statutory guidance cites some examples relevant to the care leaving population for those young people:

- whose needs have been largely met by their educational institution, but who, once they leave, will require their needs to be met in some other way (e.g. those with autism, learning disabilities);
- detained in the youth justice system who will move to adult custodial services and
- receiving child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) who may also require care and support as adults even if they did not receive children's services from their local authority.

The Act also makes enquiries to safeguard adults a statutory duty, if they are thought to be at risk.

8. Health Outcomes for Looked After Children

- 8.1 Looked after children and young people share the same health risks and problems as their peers but often to a greater degree. They often enter care with a worse level of health than their peers in part due to the impact of poverty, abuse, neglect and chaotic parenting. A key role for social workers, foster carers and LAC nurses is to educate and support looked after children around healthy eating, exercise and dental care and address any areas of concern.
- 8.2 Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that health assessments are carried out for every looked after child in their care. Of the 109 Annual Health Assessments (for children who have been in care for a year) 99% were carried out on time.
- 8.3 The Local Authority should act as a 'good parent' in relation to the health of looked after children. Within that role it has the right to approve the immunisation of children within its care against vaccine preventable diseases as per the national immunisation schedule. The proportion of children with up to date immunisations continues to rise: 100% in 2016-17 compared with 99% in 2015-16. The continued improvement is related to a drive to ensure that young people receive their school leaver booster (diphtheria tetanus and polio), to ensure that eligible girls are receiving the human papilloma vaccination (HPV) and that unaccompanied minors receive immunisations that they missed when living in their country of origin or when transient.
- 8.4 Dental health is an integral part of the Health Assessment. The local authority and NHS Trust are required to ensure that are looked after children receive regular check-ups with a dentist. 98% of all children in care for twelve months at 31 March 2017 had their teeth checked by a dentist, a slight improvement from last year.

- 8.5 Due to the nature of their experiences prior to and during being looked after, many looked after children will have poor mental health. This may be in the form of significant emotional, psychological or behavioural difficulties. A total of 57 looked after children received a service from the specialist LAC Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) during 2016-17, although additional children also received therapeutic interventions local to their placement or within residential provision. During 2017-18 we are reviewing the commissioning delivery models for LAC CAMHS services including whether the service is brought in-house and extending the service for care leavers.
- 8.6 98% of children in care for twelve months aged 4 to 16 years had a strengths and difficulties questionnaire completed, this represents an improvement from 89% in 2015-16 and 73% in 2014-15, although an area in which we wish to achieve continued improvements since it assists in identifying and addressing difficulties early to try to prevent escalation.
- 8.7 A joint Housing and Leaving Care Health and Wellbeing Event was held in April 2017 to both raise awareness with young people, signpost them to services, increase awareness of the health needs of care leavers and to improve partnership working across the professional networks. The event was attended by approximately 80 staff representing 25 providers across Children's Services, Public Health, Housing and the voluntary sector. Additionally, a Care Leavers Partnership Group has been established that meets quarterly and focuses on improving health provisions and partnership working for care leavers. Key partners include LAC nurses, Housing, Virtual School, substance misuse services, mental health services and health trainers.

9. Educational Outcomes for Looked After Children

- 9.1 Firstly, it is important to note the significant changes in the assessment, marking and reporting procedures used by schools and Local Authorities that were introduced in 2015-16. The expected standard has been raised and the accountability framework for schools has also changed. Therefore, the DfE has advised schools and Local Authorities that it would be incorrect and misleading to make direct comparisons with previous year showing changes over time.
- 9.2 Detailed analysis of each cohort of pupils in 2017 indicates Westminster looked after children and care leavers continue to make good progress in most areas and have obtained their predicted levels and grades. In light of the above context attention should be paid to individual stories and progress each child/young person rather looking at the headline outcomes.
- 9.3 **Progress and attainment at Key Stage 1**
There were 3 pupils in the reporting cohort. All three of the pupils in this cohort made expected progress, with one pupil exceeding age related expectations in their writing and all three pupils exceeding age related expectations in Science.

9.4 Progress and attainment at Key Stage 2

There were 4 pupils in the reporting cohort. One of the pupils attends a Welsh school and therefore while they are included in the reporting figures below, they were not entered for SATS, from which these measures were judged against. 50% of this cohort currently receive support for Special Educational Needs (SEN), although they do not have an Education Health Care Plan.

| | New expected standard reading | New expected standard grammar, punctuation and spelling | New expected standard Maths | New expected standard in all areas |
|---|-------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| WCC LAC | 25% | 50% | 50% | 25% |
| National LAC Data 2015-16 (data for 2016-17 not yet released) | 25% | 25% | 25% | 25% |
| National data for all pupils | 71% | 77% | 75% | 61% |

9.5 Initial analysis of this year's results would appear to show a widening of the gap between looked after children and all pupils. However, it is important to note the likely impact of the new assessment arrangements on looked after children. Analysis of attainment for these pupils at KS1 would seem to have indicated that the majority would have achieved higher results; 75% of this cohort achieved at least a level 2 in all areas as KS1. Despite not achieving the expected standard in some areas many pupils achieved a scaled score in reading and Maths of only a few marks below the expected standard scaled score of 100.

9.6 It is also significant that many of the pupils experienced considerable disruption and difficulties over the previous two years; 50% of the cohort had one or more placement move in the last two years, with 50% of the cohort experiencing more than one school move. All of the pupils are educated in out of borough primary schools.

9.7 Progress and attainment at Key Stage 4

It is difficult to compare this year's grades to previous years due to the introduction of numbered grades for English and Maths instead to replace A* to C grades brought in by DfE to raise standards.

9.8 There were 13 pupils in the reporting cohort.

| | 5 A*-C including English and Maths | 5 A*-C | 5 A*-G | 1 A*-G |
|---|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| WCC LAC 2016-17 | 23% | 31% | 46% | 62% |
| WCC LAC 2015-16 | 18.75% | 25 | 50 | 100 |
| National LAC Data 2015-16 (data for 2016-17 not yet released) | 13.6% | Not available | Not available | Not available |

9.9 Initial analysis of the statistics indicates a slight increase in the percentage who achieved 5 GCSE grade A* to C including English and Maths (or equivalent using the new numbered grades). However, changes in the nature of GCSEs means any comparison with previous years should be treated with caution. 2016-17's Year 11 cohort included a range of pupils. It included a number of highly motivated and able pupils, who achieved excellent results (one child obtained 7 A*-As), but it also included 4 pupils with Statements/EHCP who were not expected to achieve as highly, one UASC who has been missing for more than twelve months and therefore was not entered for any exams and one pupil who has school attendance issues. 92% of the cohort had school moves within the last two years (as part of coming into care) and 54% of the cohort had placement moves. This further highlight the significant impact placement and school stability has upon academic outcomes. There were also 5 UASCs who entered care in KS4, whose level of English meant they were unable to achieve the higher GCSE grades.

9.10 Post 16 and Care Leavers: End of academic year performance

| | Westminster 2016-17 | Westminster 2015-16 |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|
| % of 16 and 17 year olds who are EET | 79% | 76% |
| % of 18-25 year olds who are EET (breakdown below) | 64% | 69% |
| % and number attending university | 14% - 25 | 16% - 26 |
| % and number attending education and further education | 51% - 93 | 37% - 55 |
| % and number in training, employment or apprenticeships | 20% - 36 | 16% - 26 |

9.11 Steady progress has been made in addressing the issues and barriers around sustaining education, training and employment for post 16 looked after children and care leavers. NEET/EET levels fluctuate but analysis of EET performance at the end of the 2017 academic year shows performance is better than for current data available for care leavers nationally (58% EET). The Virtual School continues to provide a lot of input to young people to address when they are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET.

9.12 Attendance and Exclusions

| | Westminster | | | |
|---|-------------|------|------|------|
| | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
| Average attendance R-11 | 91% | 88% | 92% | 88% |
| Number with one or more fixed term exclusion | 14 | 11 | 14 | 19 |
| Number with permanent exclusion | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

The attendance figures for 2017 show a slight decline in performance over the past year. This was largely attributed to the profile of new care entrants and their complex needs and school history prior to entering care. There were again no permanent exclusions in 2016-17. This reflects the work the Virtual School undertakes directly with schools, social workers and carers in developing strategies to avoid permanent exclusion. There were 19 pupils with one or more fixed term exclusion in 2016-17, this represents the stricter behaviour policies that are being implemented by academies.

10. Engagement and Participation

10.1 Westminster offers an extensive programme of participation for both looked after children and care leavers, providing them with opportunities to participate and engage within the service. This programme includes a variety of groups, consultation events, projects as well as recreational and enrichment activities. In doing so, it is recognised that the children and young people we work with want to participate in different ways and in varying degrees. Some young people want direct involvement in consultation and decision making whilst others might want to attend a group or activity. This means that we have a core group of looked after children and care leavers that frequently participate within all aspects of the programme and more specific opportunities that attract many of the wider population. In doing so, we recognise that the children and young people we work with want to participate in different ways and in varying degrees. Some young people want direct involvement in consultation and decision making whereas others might want to attend a group or an activity. Working in this flexible manner means that Westminster has a core group of looked after children and care leavers that frequently participate within all aspects of the programme as well as providing opportunities for others placed further out of borough to participate differently.

- 10.2 Part of the core group of children and care leavers that regularly participate are members of the Children and Young People's Panel (CYPP). It has eight core members ranging from the ages of 15-20 years old and they meet every six weeks, whereby sessions are a mixture of consultation and recreational activities. There are a further nine young people who may attend CYPP meetings and other activities sporadically. This flexible way of working allows for each young person to engage in their own way according to their availability.
- 10.3 Over the past year, CYPP members have been involved in attending Westminster's Corporate Parenting Board, to present the findings of consultations carried out with looked after children and care leavers. They have also taken part in delivering events such as the Winter Festivities Party and Education Awards. They have also been recruitment interview panel members for management posts, the EET Co-ordinator and new Participation Officer during the past 12 months, enabling them to have a voice in decision making around appointments. It is recognised that their involvement helps with recruiting a more child focused workforce that values the participation of young people. Overall, the CYPP have a significant profile throughout Children's Services, whereby they are well known by corporate parenting members, other professionals and by some of the tri-borough departments.
- 10.4 Consultations are carried out with looked after children and care leavers throughout 2016-17. A thematic approach is used whereby children and young people are consulted quarterly based on the 6 strands of the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy. The following topics were consulted on from April 2016- March 2017:
- Care Leavers Experiences of Custody
 - Young People's Views About Engaging in Employment, Work Experience and Apprenticeships
 - Looked After Children Experiences of Having Contact with their Families
 - The Education Experiences of Looked After Young People Who Are Unaccompanied Minors or Have Experienced Placement Disruption
 - Participation in Westminster
 - Older Looked After Young People and Care Leavers Wishes, Views and Experiences around Health
- 10.5 The findings of these consultations are presented at the Corporate Parenting Board by the CYPP Panel and influence the development of various work streams within the Service Development Group. Their recommendations and feedback has directly led to practice changes including in respect of the role of the supervisor during supervised contact, access to learning support materials and LAC Nurses making direct contact with care leavers to review their health and signpost where appropriate.
- 10.6 Other groups, activities and events which are part of the participation programme include a Tuesday cooking group, Winter Festivities Party, annual Sayers Croft

Residential trip, a wide ranging enrichment activities programme and an annual Education Awards Ceremony. A number of looked after children and care leavers also participated in a creative arts group programme that focuses on self-esteem and emotional wellbeing. A celebration event that showcased their work was held at Tate Britain and resulted in several of them going on to participate in a London wide Tate youth arts programme. Overwhelmingly positive feedback received from participants has resulted in the programme being re-commissioned.

11. Outcomes for Care Leavers

- 11.1 The Leaving Care Service assists, befriends and advises young people to make a successful transition from the Council’s care to independent living in the community.
- 11.2 Care leavers move into the Leaving Care Service at the age of 18 when they officially leave care and become an adult. At this point, they are allocated a Personal Advisor who takes full case responsibility. The Pathway Plan sets out the support available for all aspect of their life, with a particular emphasis on securing settled accommodation and appropriate education, employment and training (EET). The Plan is reviewed every six months until the young person is 21, or later if they are completing an agreed course of education, training and employment. If, however, a young person wishes to remain allocated to their Social Worker post 18 years and this is assessed to be in their interests a flexible approach is adopted.
- 11.3 The Leaving Care Service supported up to 166 young people in the current year, comparable to the previous year, which includes a rise in care leavers who came into care as adolescents such as unaccompanied minors seeking asylum and in high need, complex cases where the young person came into care over the age of 14 from the citizen population.

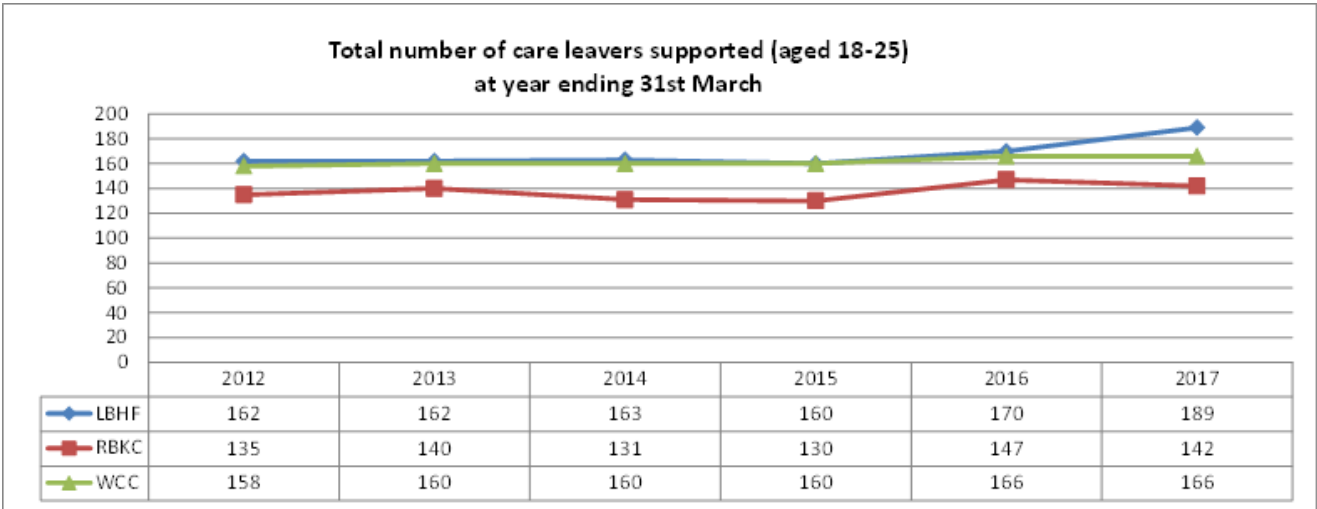


Table 6: Care Leaver Numbers March 2012 – March 2017

- 11.4 Since 2011 a former care leaver over the age of 21, but under 25, and closed to the service is able to return to ask for their case to be reopened in order to

complete a course of EET up to the level of a first degree. The legislative changes arising from the Children and Social Work Act 2017 extends this to include that they can return to seek advice, support and the allocation of a Personal Advisor up until the age of 25 irrespective of whether they are in education. It also extends that the corporate parenting duties would not end at 21 years if they are NEET. Care leavers can opt out of this but have the freedom to subsequently request support at a later stage. Projections indicate that this could lead to an additional 50 care leavers being open to the service by 2020-21, albeit some may not wish to receive the full duties or may fully opt out.

- 11.5 At the end of March 2017, 64% of care leavers were in education, employment or training (those NEET included young parents, missing UASCs and those in custody). This includes 25 care leavers that are attending university and a further 5 that are off to university in Autumn 2017. This is above the national average for care leavers. Seven care leavers obtained university degrees in Summer 2017; one achieved a first class honours degree in Computing and IT Security, one who has secured employment with a bank following the completion of a Business and Finance degree and one in Aeronautical Engineering which has resulted in employment with an international engineering company. This young man has also created a successfully published App for care leavers called "Foundations – Care Leavers" which is designed to provide a wide range of practical information to support with transitions to independence. Additionally, there is one young person who will complete their graduate diploma in law and who is being supported to gain meaningful work experience within the field before applying to complete the LPC.
- 11.6 A key priority is improving the availability, choice and promotion of apprenticeships and employment for care leavers. Westminster's Virtual School publicises vacancies on a weekly basis to care leavers, provides drop in sessions and individualised packages to support care leavers in accessing and sustaining employment and training. This includes support with writing CVs, interview preparation and accompanying young people to interviews. Current apprenticeships include within the Council, working for an MP, working as a trainee practice manager within the NHS, as a sous chef with News UK, with a dry lining firm following the successful completion of a construction course and with a car manufacturer. One care leaver recently obtained paid employment with the Council as an engagement officer. Westminster has recently appointed a Post 16 EET Co-ordinator. The key priorities of this new role is to develop partnerships with Council colleagues and with businesses outside the Council to create a wider range of ambitious, stimulating and rewarding apprenticeships and employment opportunities specifically for Westminster care leavers. The post intends to be enterprising and take account of the wealth of businesses located within the borough.
- 11.7 All but 84% of care leavers were in suitable accommodation at March 2017. Of those not in suitable accommodation the majority (26) were either in custody,

deported former unaccompanied minors or missing to avoid deportation. No care leavers were evicted from their final stage accommodation or living in bed and breakfast accommodation. In 2016 Westminster's Housing Service increased the supply of final stage social housing for eligible care leavers to 24 properties per year, thus enabling more care leavers to access suitable and affordable accommodation within their borough of origin. A joint Housing and Leaving Care Service Panel meets to agree nominations and review what additional interventions some care leavers require to address their needs and enable them to eventually live independently and manage a tenancy. Additionally, a collaborative initiative between Children, Housing and Economy Services has resulted in the creation of a joint funded Care Leaver Housing and Employment Coach. This post supports care leavers to manage a tenancy, to budget and manage on an income, to become economically active and financially self-reliant via sustainable employment. During the 9 months of implementation this pilot has supported 7 care leavers maintain their tenancies where there was a real risk of eviction and 6 achieve and sustain employment. An approximate estimate is that this has led to a Council saving of £49,000. Following the first year proving so successful the three departments have agreed to joint fund this post for a further 2 years.

- 11.8 In October 2017 Cllr Holloway agreed that the Council would financially support care leavers who are liable to pay council tax charges for a period of 3 years. Nationally thirty-four other local authorities have so far introduced this exemption. Managing budgets can be very challenging for vulnerable young people adjusting to living independently. We want to ensure that as they begin to manage their finances as young adults that we relieve some of this pressure and that they are given this additional help as they move from care to independence. The decision follows a report by the Children's Society, called "Wolf at the Door" which revealed that council tax debt can be a particularly frightening experience for care leavers. What can start out for many care leavers as falling slightly behind can very quickly escalate to a court summons and enforcement action being taken. This additional support will give our care leavers a helping hand in their first step towards independence, helping them to avoid debt as they learn to manage their finances.

**HELEN FARRELL
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**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the
Background Papers please contact Report Author x5341
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