

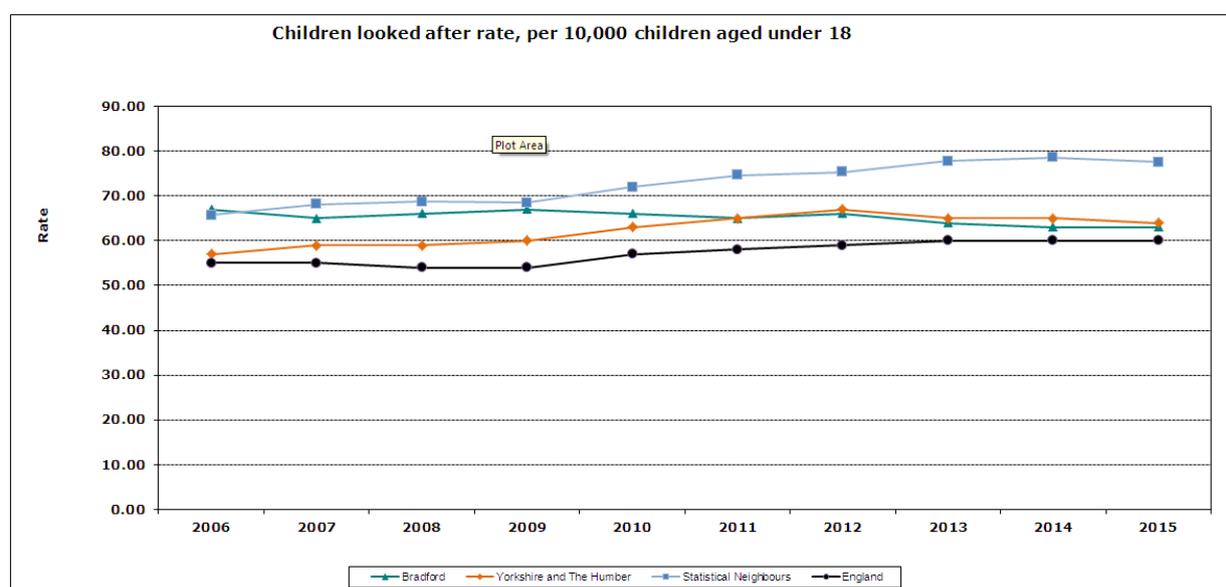
4.1.12 Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Introduction: why is this important?

The services the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council provide to our looked after children and care leavers are very important in shaping their future. Partners working with looked after children and care leavers are committed to ensuring that every looked after child has the best possible start in life, is given every help to achieve their potential and experiences safe and positive care.

What do the facts and figures tell us?

There were 878 children looked after at 31st March 2015, which is the same as last year, whereas nationally there was a 1% increase compared to 31st March 2014. The children looked after rate for Bradford, at 63 per 10,000 population, is below the average for the statistical neighbour group (77.5 per 10,000 population) and slightly above the national average (60 per 10,000 population).



For the 12 months up to 31st March 2015 there were 294 children who started to be looked after, this was a decrease of 7.5% on last year's figure of 318. The proportion of 0-4 year olds becoming looked after has fallen over the last three years, however there has been a steady increase in the proportion of 5-9 and 10-15 year olds becoming looked after.

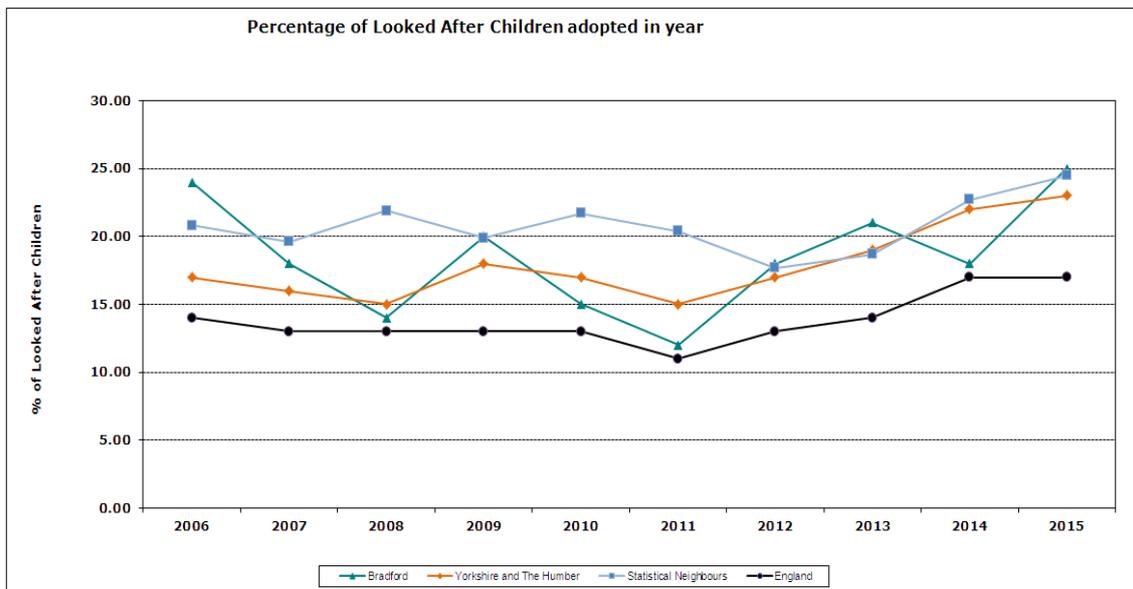
301 children and young people ceased to be looked after during the year ending 31st March 2015, a decrease of 8% on last year figure of 326. The proportion ceasing care by age group has remained similar to last year with a slight increase in the proportion of 10-15 year olds ceasing care and a fall in the 16+ age group.

Outcomes

Keeping Children Safe:

Ensuring looked after children and young people are in stable placements is a key priority for Children's Specialist Services. At 31st March 2015 73% of children and young people were in long term placements. This compares favourably with the England average of 68%. Bradford is ranked 25 out of all Local Authorities. 9.2% of children and young people have had 3 or more placements in the year. This compares favourably with the England average of 10%. Bradford is ranked 48 out of all Local Authorities.

75 (25%) looked after children were adopted during the year to 31 March 2015; this is an increase on last year when it was 60 (18%). This compares favourably with the statistical neighbours and England average of 24.5% and 17%. Bradford is ranked 18th best performing Local Authority for this indicator.



The number of children who ceased care on a Special Guardianship orders increased slightly, 49 (16%) compared to 42 (13%) in 2014.

There has been an increase in the offending rate 7% in 2015 compared to 5.5% last year. This compares unfavourably with the Statistical and England average of 5%.

Keeping Children Healthy

Analysis shows that there has been an increase in the number attending the dentist 93% compared to last year of 84%. This compares favourably with the Statistical neighbours average of 86.5% and England average of 86%. The percentage having an annual Health Assessment also increased, 93% compared to 88% last year. This compares favourably with the Statistical neighbours average of 86.5% and is in line with the England average of 93%.

The emotional health needs of children and young people looked after for more than a year in Bradford District are assessed through the 'Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire' (SDQ). An SDQ generates an individual score for each child (between 1-40), 0-13 is a normal level of emotional need, 14-16 some concerns and 17+ very concerning. The highest figures are a predictor of emotional difficulties. 70% of Young People looked after for a year or more and aged between 5 -16 had an SDQ completed, compared to 65% last year. The average value for completed questionnaires is 13.7, which is slightly higher than the previous year's average of 12.6. However this still compares favourably with the Statistical Neighbours average of 14.3 and England average of 13.9.

Achieving Independence & Economic Wellbeing:

At 31st March 2015 the proportion of Care Leavers aged between 19 and 21 who were in education, employment and training had risen to 51% compared to 36% the previous year. This compares favourably with the England average of 48% and Bradford is ranked 54 out of all Local Authorities. This is a new measure which now looks at the position of care leavers on their 19th, 20th and 21st birthday, compared to the previous measure which only looked at the position on the 19th birthday.

Again the cohort for Care Leavers living in suitable accommodation has also changed to look at 19th, 20th and 21st birthday position. At 31st March 2015 Bradford had 87% of this cohort in suitable accommodation compared to last year's figure of 75%. Bradford compares favourably with the England average of 81%. Bradford is ranked 52 out of all Local Authorities.

What strategies, policies and best practice have been developed locally and nationally?

- Bradford District Plan 2016-2010
- Children and Young people's Plan 2016-2020
- Pledge for Looked After Children 2015
- Looked After Children Strategy 2014-2016
- Journey to Excellence Programme 2016-2017
- Bradford Missing from Home Strategy 2016-2017
- Review of Corporate Parenting arrangements
- Child Sexual Exploitation and Anti Bullying Policies

What challenges have been identified in a local context?

By 2020 it is estimated the money for Council services that is under the Council's direct control will reduce by some £100 million, from £401 million today to around £300 million - that's over 25% and is on top of the £172million savings already made.

The numbers of younger and older people are growing and so is the number of people with disabilities. That means there are a lot more of us living here and, because people are living a lot longer, there are more of us who need care. Other challenges include more children needing care and protection.

Bradford's Children's Services and Safeguarding Board are required to have an Early Help offer to the public which will deliver improved outcomes to families. Early Help forms part of Children's Services Ofsted inspection framework.

Bradford's existing Early Help offer is not robust. It is a mixture of discrete services which deliver a range of services without clear focus, vision, ownership or performance framework.

What do our stakeholders tell us?

The Corporate Parenting Panel plays a vital role in making sure that looked after children and care leavers get the best care possible so they get a good start in life. There is a wide representation on the panel with partner agencies, education, health, the police and young people. The corporate parents have promised within the revised children's pledge to be responsible for monitoring and reviewing services provided for looked after children to make sure they are improving and building on successes achieved.

The Viewpoint system is now being used for canvassing the views of looked after children online. Use of this system is continuing to develop and managers share on a quarterly basis reports on Viewpoint completion levels and the key themes that emerge. This information is used to inform strategic planning and individual planning for children. The Children in Care Council meets regularly with senior leaders of the Council and works in a focused way with the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Recommendations: What do we need to do? How do we ensure this remains a priority?

- Children in care are often in much greater need than other children. Every child who is looked after needs a secure place to live and to enjoy the support they need to have a safe, happy, healthy, secure and loving childhood which nurtures their aspirations and enables them to fulfil their potential
- All looked after children and young people need to be in environments that will have a positive impact on their health and emotional wellbeing and enable them to build positive peer and adult relationships
- All looked after children and young people need to be supported in achieving their full potential in education and learning

- Children need timely permanency planning, with a choice of suitable permanent carers identified and available to meet their long term needs
- Looked after disabled children and young people need to be in placements where support arrangements meet their additional needs
- Young people leaving care need to be supported to develop into active, successful citizens by moving into secure, safe and supported independent living
- Journey to Excellence is a new programme of change. Its purpose is to ensure we have a shared approach to working with families that builds on their strengths and provides safety and stability for children. The programme will transform services, improve outcomes and provide financial savings over time

References

Looked after Children Strategy 2014-16

<https://www.bradford.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/45E98357-2569-4658-ACF3-B36AA598441C/0/LACstrategy.pdf>

Journey to Excellence

http://www.bradford.gov.uk/bmdc/health_well-being_and_care/child_care/journey_to_excellence_thriving_children_strong_families