

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

1 JULY 2021

QUESTION 1 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Councillor White to ask the Chair of the Committee:

Children Taken into Care

Green Councillors didn't support the outsourcing of the care of our looked after children but are keen to support Brighter Futures for Children now that it has that responsibility.

1. Can the Lead Councillor please outline the number of young people taken into care per population of young people, and compare this with figures from the South East and statistical neighbours over the past few years ?
2. If there are any significant differences, could the Lead Councillor give us her analysis on what the reasons are for those differences ?
3. The most important question is this - if there are differences, and historically Reading has a high number of young people taken into care, what is the impact on the outcomes for those children? Is the consequence of high numbers that a budget has to stretch much further than anywhere else, and is the consequence of that budget stretch diminished outcomes for our children ?

REPLY by the Chair of the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee:

I invite Councillor Terry, the Lead Councillor for Children to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by Councillor Terry, Lead Councillor for Children:

1. Can the Lead Councillor please outline the number of young people taken into care per population of young people, and compare this with figures from the South East and statistical neighbours over the past few years ?

The comparable data for looked after children is set out below:

Looked After Children

Rate of children who started to be looked after during the year per 10,000 children	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Reading	38	29	24	31
Stat Neighbours	31	27	27	27
South East	23	22	22	22
England	28	27	27	26

Total number coming into care in Reading	140	107	89	116
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Over the four years shown in the table there was a decreasing number of children coming into care from 140 to 107 then 89.

In 2019/20 there was an increase of 27 children compared to the previous year resulting in a total of 116 children that year. This is in part due to taking 10 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, 4 young people being placed on remand, 14 coming in on an emergency basis.

Reducing the number of children in care is a key area of focus which has resulted in Reading being more aligned to both the statistical neighbours and national figures in 2021/21 although the data has not yet been published.

2. If there are any significant differences, could the Lead Councillor give us her analysis on what the reasons are for those differences ?

There are no significant differences beyond the well-established socio-economic challenges facing families in urban areas in the south east and beyond.

That said it is accepted that the impact of children's social care in Reading having been judged 'inadequate' in 2016 was a more cautious approach that led to an increase in the number of children coming in to care.

However as can be seen the position has been improving overtime."

3. The most important question is this - if there are differences, and historically Reading has a high number of young people taken into care, what is the impact on the outcomes for those children? Is the consequence of high numbers that a budget has to stretch much further than anywhere else, and is the consequence of that budget stretch diminished outcomes for our children ?

This question appears to be based on a false characterisation that resources are more stretched in Reading than elsewhere and that therefore must have an impact on our looked after children. The statement also appears to suggest a premise that every council has the same budget for meeting the needs of children's services - this is simply not true.

We will continue to prioritise meeting the needs of our children in care, including their living environments, education and mental health - and ensuring the provision of a local budget to meet those needs.