

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

18TH JANUARY 2017

SAFELY MANAGING CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

REPORT OF GROUP DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, COUNCILLOR G HOPKINS

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Cabinet with an update on the numbers of Children Looked After within Rhondda Cynon Taf and to make Cabinet aware of the actions being taken to ensure that those who are looked after remain looked after for the shortest possible period.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the information contained within this report and the actions being taken to address areas of further improvement.

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To provide Cabinet with details of the actions being undertaken to safely reduce the number of Children Looked After (CLA) where appropriate.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The rate at which children became looked after over the last few years, other than in 2014/2015, has risen year on year with the highest annual increases occurring in 2010/11 when the increase was recorded as 15%.
- 4.2 In 2016/2017 the number of children becoming looked in September 2016 was 685, a 77 increase when compared to the same period in 2015.

4.3 For the period April 2016 to September 2016:

- 50% of children who became looked after between April 2016 and September 2016 were aged between 0-4 at the point of admission, this compares to 45% in this age group for 2015 admissions. This is significant in terms of long term commitments.
- 73% of children and young people who became looked after were placed with RCT Foster Carers, 30% of them with Kinship Carers (relatives). This compares to 72% of children and young people placed with RCT Foster Carers in the same period of 2015 and was achieved despite a 57% increase in the number of admissions into the looked after system.
- The percentage of children placed with relative carers at point of admission increased from 21% in 2015 to 30% in 2016.
- 32% of the children and young people who became looked after during this period have now ceased to be looked after. 30% have returned home to their parents or other family members.
- 32% more children remain in care longer than 12 weeks when compared with previous years (the average length of time that children are looked after remained at 125 weeks in 2014/2015 and 2015/2016).

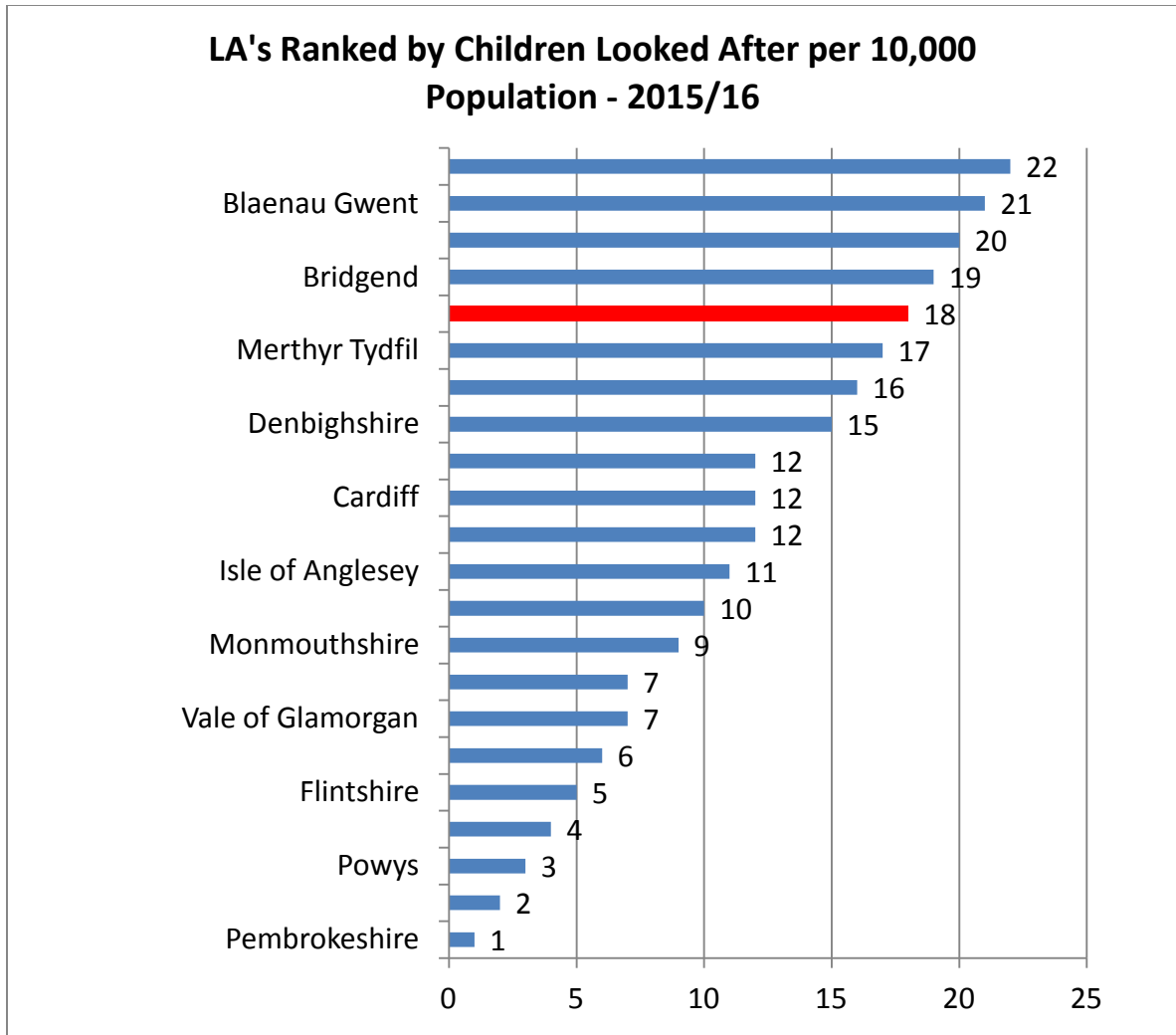
4.4 The rise in the number of admissions has also led to a rise in the number of care proceedings initiated during the course of each year. In 2013/2014, 80 Care Orders were granted, in 2014/2015, 70 Care Orders were granted where as in 2015/2016, 100 care orders were granted, an increase of 43%. There has also been an increase in the number of Special Guardianship Orders granted, 33 in 2013/2014, 52 in 2014/2015 and 57 in 2015/2016.

5. THE NATIONAL PICTURE

5.1 The increase in the number of Children Looked After and the rate of admissions in RCT appears to be replicated in a number of authorities throughout Wales. However, there is no published comparative data to evidence this at this point. The only up-to-date data is for 2015/2016 which places RCT at 18th out of the 22 Local Authorities for the numbers of Children Looked After per 10,000 population.

Children Looked After per 10,000 Population		
Local Authority	2014-15	2015-16
Isle of Anglesey	65	80
Gwynedd	81	88
Conwy	72	78
Denbighshire	83	90

Flintshire	68	65
Wrexham	60	66
Powys	54	59
Ceredigion	62	62
Pembrokeshire	47	52
Carmarthenshire	64	58
Swansea	109	108
Neath Port Talbot	156	135
Bridgend	135	131
Vale of Glamorgan	69	72
Cardiff	89	88
Rhondda Cynon Taf	124	125
Merthyr Tydfil	131	113
Caerphilly	70	72
Blaenau Gwent	98	139
Torfaen	120	142
Monmouthshire	60	73
Newport	86	88



6. MANAGING COST

- 6.1 The costs associated with CLA placements are both significant and volatile and as such this service area presents a significant financial risk for all Local Authorities across the UK.
- 6.2 RCTCBC currently spends approximately £21m per annum (approximately £405,000 per week) on CLA placements (including financial support to children placed under Special Guardianship Orders or Residence Orders).
- 6.3 As demand for CLA placements rises it is increasingly important for the Council to ensure that placements are commissioned as cost effectively as possible whilst remaining safe and appropriate. The Council uses a number of strategies to assist in managing the 'commissioning mix' of placements, these include:

- Periodical review of placement type
- Re-patriation of high cost residential care placements to more local and cost effective residential placements or family placements (where deemed appropriate)
- Ongoing challenge and negotiation of external fee rates.
- Use of block contracts.
- Promoting independence, prior to 18th birthday (where appropriate).
- Maximising recruitment and occupancy of In-house Family Placements (Foster carers)
- Promotion & support of Special Guardian Order Placements (Non CLA Status)

6.4 CLA placements broadly fall into 2 categories, Residential Care and Family Placements, the typical costs associated with each type of placement is shown below:

Type of Placement		Cost Per Week		
		Oct 14	Oct 16	% increase / decrease
Residential Care	External Residential	£2,963	£2,871	-3%
	In-house Residential *	£2,604	£3,201	23%
Family Placements	External Fostering	£707	£710	1%
	Mainstream Foster	£429	£452	5%
	Relative Foster	£217	£233	7%
	SGO's & Residence Orders	£96	£100	5%

* Note: weekly cost of in-house residential care for 2016 is higher than expected due to specific issues in respect of management of void bed's

6.5 Managing the 'commissioning mix' of placements has been a key priority for the Community and Childrens Services Group over recent years.

6.6 A review of CLA placements and their costs over the period October 2014 to October 2016 has provided some evidence that the strategies used to manage the 'commissioning mix' has had some success. The analysis showed that:

- At October 2014 – 805 CLA (incl. SGO) places were financially supported at a cost of £427,000 per week (£22.2M per annum).
- At October 2016 - 919 CLA (incl. SGO) places were financially supported at a cost of £405,000 per week (£21M per annum).

- At October 2016 – 114 additional CLA (incl. SGO) places were financially supported with a reduced cost of approx £1.2M per annum.
- The reliance on high cost residential care placements has reduced from 62 placements at October 2014 to 48 placements at October 2016.
- The number of Family Placements increased from 743 at October 2014 to 871 at October 2016.
- The number of Family Placements supported by In-house foster carers increased (from 326 to 355) whilst during the same period reliance upon higher cost external foster carers reduced (from 200 to 186).

Further analysis of data can be found in Appendix One – Supporting Information.

7. **KEY ISSUES**

7.1 The level of pressure experienced because of the high number of children looked after needs continuous focus and action. A CLA Action Planning Group was established in 2010 which is made up of senior managers from the group and financial colleagues to continually monitor the situation. Its purpose and focus has recently been reviewed and currently its membership increased to include the Head of the 4C's Regional/National Commissioning Unit. The review has also resulted in the action plan being updated to take into account the learning from other local authorities, specifically Swansea, and to ensure that the focus is placed on the following key areas:

- **Prevention** - essentially this is identifying key actions that will enable the service to prevent children entering the children looked after system. This includes examining the effectiveness of existing prevention work and developing new initiatives on the basis of national evidence of effectiveness.
- **Childs journey in Care** - with a focus on ensuring that rehabilitation or community based options are actively pursued in relation to each child looked after at any given time.
- **Discharge from Care** - this focuses on children leaving the care system permanently and can include SGO, adoption or the discharge of care orders.
- **Commissioning mix** - This includes issues such as making our residential facilities and foster carers more effective, increasing the number of in-house foster carers and negotiating with external providers.
- **Partner influences** - this requires working with partner agencies who have particular influence on children becoming or staying in the looked after system i.e. Courts, CAFCASS, Legal Services, CAMHS.

7.2 Progress has already been made in relation to a number of key areas in the Action Plan. These include:

- The establishment of a project whose sole purpose will be to challenge the Permanency Planning for all children and young people who are on the edge of care or come into the care system, including those children and young people who are part of the PLO process. This team will also work with partners who have an influence on children becoming looked after.
- Completion of the development of a consistent Safe Care Arrangement Process for all children and young people who are on the edge of care.
- The setting up of a Children Looked after Quality Assurance Group that meet weekly that include colleagues from Health and Education. The main function of the group is to analysis the decision making for those children that enter the care system and look at alternatives, including the financial implications.
- With support from the 4C's ensure that external placements are value for money and that children and young people can be placed in appropriate placements (step down from residential to fostering to home if appropriate) within RCT.
- Continue to promote the use of an outcome focus planning approach for children and young people and their families to ensure that when children are looked after their carers are providing care that helps them achieve their goals and prepares then to return home or leave care.
- Continuing to work with the Community and Prosperity Service to develop a draft service delivery model for providing Integrated Family Support Services within RCT that uses the Vulnerability and Resilience Profiling and includes all elements of early intervention within children services.
- Implement an enhanced Risk Framework Model early next year across Children Services that covers early intervention prevention as well as intensive intervention.
- Develop a Multi Agency Commissioning Strategy for Children and Young People through the Cwm Taf Partnership Board that will place expectations on partners to work with children, young people and their families to reduce the number of children looked after.

8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 This is an information report and therefore no Equality and Diversity screening is required.

9. CONSULTATION

9.1 None

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

10.1 The financial implications are addressed in the body of the report.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

11.1 The legislative requirements for Children Looked After and those needing care and support are set within the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

12. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/SIP

12.1 The actions suggested in this report complements the Council's Corporate priorities to promote independence and positive lives for everyone by ensuring:

- Health and social care services will be personalised and integrated with more people supported to live longer in their own homes.
- Rhondda Cynon Taf's children and young people will receive a great start in life.

13. CONCLUSION

13.1 In general the rates of children becoming looked after continue to rise and needs to continue to be a priority within the service area. There is no “appropriate” number for the rate of children becoming looked after in RCT that would help calculate whether numbers are too high or too low. However, it is important that we continue to prioritise a safe reduction in CLA numbers and to deliver the best possible outcomes for the children and young people of RCT. The reasons why children become looked after are complex and include the complex interaction of demographic and socio economic trends as well as factors connected to the way the local area organises and deploys its services to vulnerable children and families.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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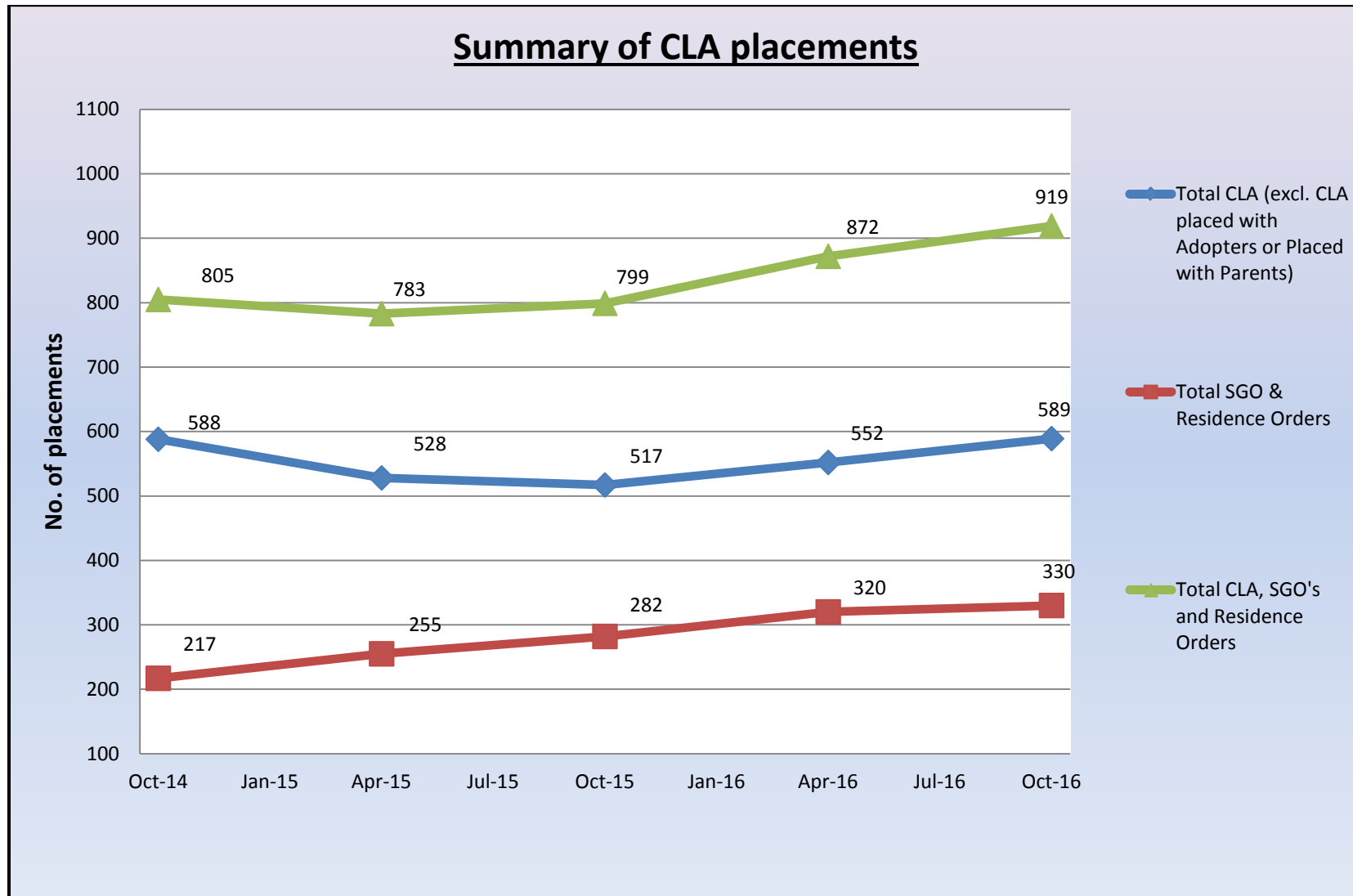
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Background Papers:

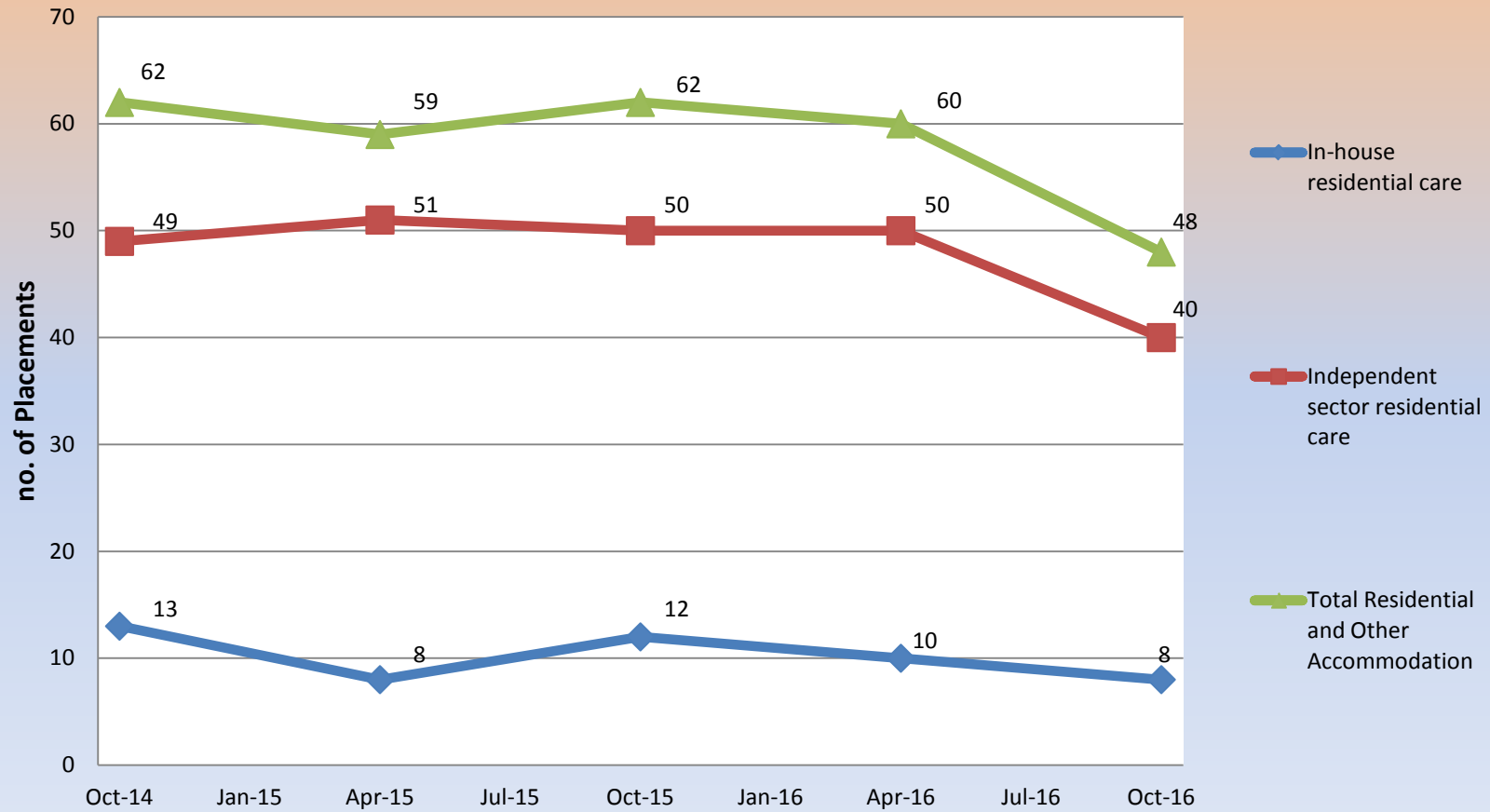
None.

Officer to contact: Ann Batley, Service Director Children's Services

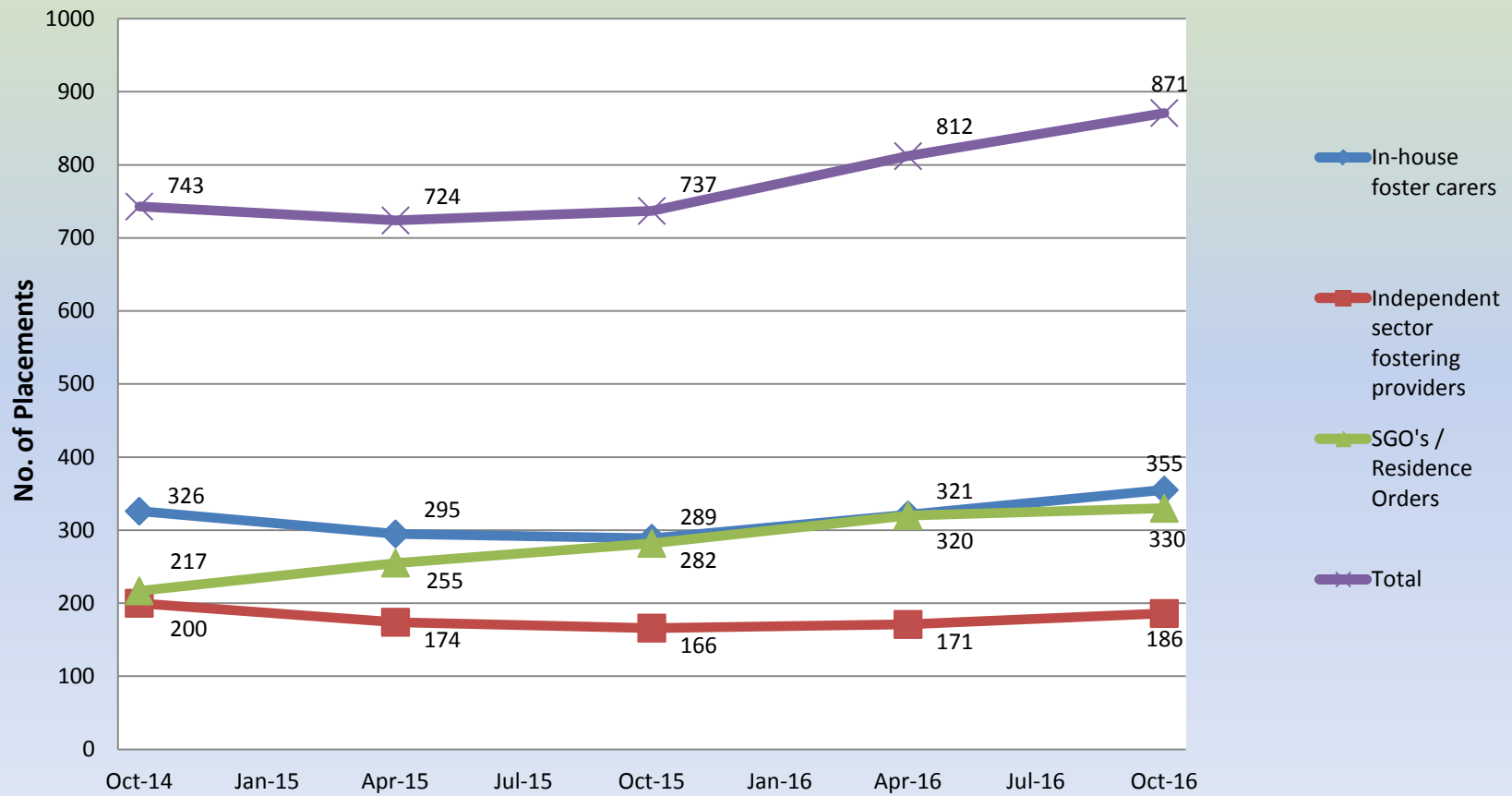
Supporting Information:-



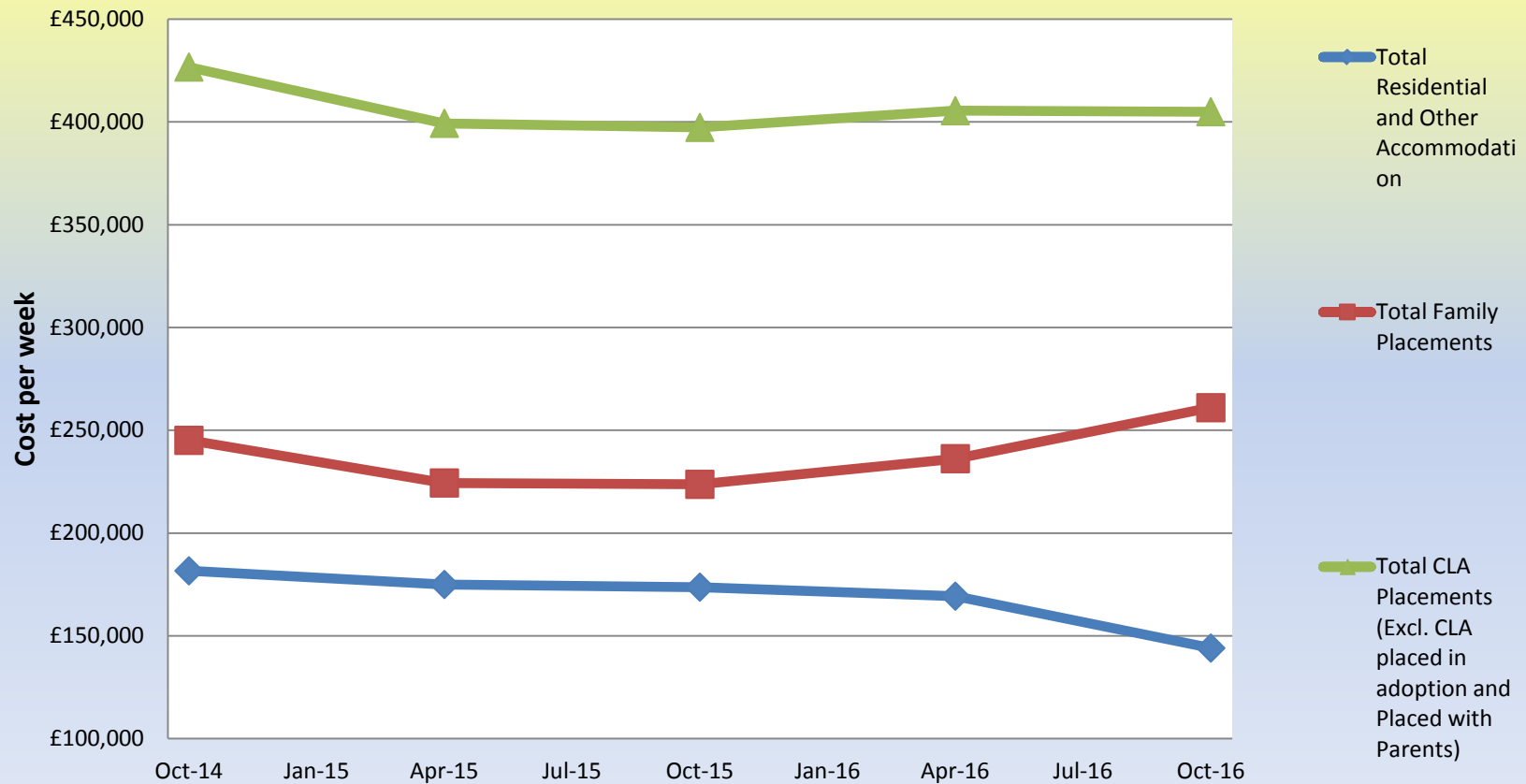
Summary of Residential Care Placements



Summary of Family Placements

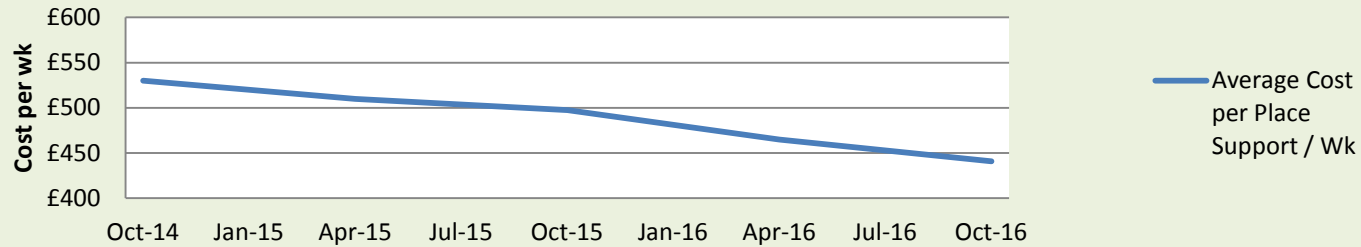


Summary of weekly costs - CLA Placements



	Oct-14	Apr-15	Oct-15	Apr-16	Oct-16
Total Weekly cost	£427,000	£400,000	£397,000	£405,000	£405,000
Total Places Supported	805	783	799	872	919
Average Cost per Place Support / Wk	£530	£510	£497	£465	£441

Average Cost per Place Support / Wk



Total Places Supported

