

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Corporate Director of Children & Learning
to

Cabinet and all Members of Council

on

15th March 2011

Report prepared by:

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**Agenda
Item No.**

**Annual Corporate Parenting Report
Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny
Executive Councillor: Councillor Roger Hadley
*A Part 1 Public Agenda Item***

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an annual report for Cabinet on the progress and outcomes in respect of Children who are Looked After by the Council.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **That the report be noted.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council currently looks after 267 children and young people. 130 of these children are placed with in-house foster carers, and 73 with external carers. Of the remainder some are looked after by their families at home on a care order, some are at residential boarding school or therapeutic children's homes and others are placed with prospective adoptive parents.

Of the children in our care 42% go home or onto a permanent arrangement, including adoption, within 2 years. Although the overall number of looked after children remains reasonably static throughout the year, the children change. The Council will actually care for around 400 children within the year.

3.2 Improving Outcomes

Since 2006 there has been a multi-agency group, the Corporate Parenting Group (CPG), which was established in order that outcomes for Looked After Children (LAC) could be monitored and improved using a multi-agency approach. It comprises the Executive Member for Children & Learning and elected members from the other political groups, along with senior officers from Specialist Services, Health, Education, community partners and Foster Carer representation. It is chaired by a Specialist Services Group Manager. The National Youth Advisory Service and representatives attend regularly to monitor, with CPG, the progress being made on the priorities young people have identified and to update CPG on their work and emerging issues.

The group has established a strong dialogue with Voice4All (our children in care council). Changes have been made, such as ensuring their request to have direct contact with the immediate managers of social workers was honoured. This ensures Voice4All's views can influence and impact directly on social worker's practice with looked after children. They have also played a major part in constructing the looked after children's Pledge that has been accepted by the Children's Partnership.

CPG meets on a monthly basis and monitors a range of performance data and activity relating to looked after children. It is in a position to ensure actions are put in place to improve performance, respond to new Central Government Legislation and Statutory Guidance and ensure that responses are co-ordinated across the Partnership.

- 3.3 There are links between the Corporate Parenting Group and the Southend Foster Families Council (SFFC), with a foster carer regularly attending Corporate Parenting to represent Southend foster carer's views. The Executive Member also regularly attends meetings of Voice4All, the 'Children in Care Council' and other members of the Corporate Parenting Group attend as invited by the young people. There are also representatives from Connexions, Specialist Services and the Health Advisor for looked after children who attend every Voice4All meeting.
- 3.4 During 2009/10 Members attended training on different aspects of Corporate Parenting responsibilities, which was well received. A full programme of future training is being planned.
- 3.5 Performance monitoring is a central role of CPG. See Appendix 1. Outlined below is an explanation of those areas that are either performing above or below this year's targets.
- Percentage of Children adopted (National Indicator NI 61): This indicator and the number of children placed for adoption is performing above this year's targets
 - Long term stability of Looked After Children (NI 63): This indicator has been progressively declining since April (it was 77.9% in April and is now 66.7%). Since April, 24 children have moved out of this group (as they are over 16 or have left care) and unfortunately 83% (20 children) of this group were in a long term stable placement. There have been 5 children who have joined this group since April and none of them have been in long term placements. These two events together are why this indicator has declined.
 - LAC reviews completed on time (NI 66): The percentage is currently at 82% and it is quite clear that a number of reviews that are showing as late are due to electronic recording errors, which are being corrected and the outturn will reach the target.
 - Care Leavers in employment, education or training (NI 148): This percentage (from a cohort of 25 young people) is currently below target and last year's out-turn. A number of these young people are still suffering from the lasting damage that their early life experiences inflicted and which they have not been able to overcome since being in care. Their inner chaos is not conducive to stable employment or education, although efforts continue to engage them in productive activities. More of those who are in employment,

education or training are in education rather than employment which should give them a more secure future. Indeed 14 of these young people are currently at university.

- Annual Health Assessments and dental visits of LAC: Members of CPG have worked hard to improve these outturns and this percentage should rise significantly, and the target of 85% should be achieved
- Percentage of children becoming LAC during the year that are placed more than 20 miles from home (Performance Indicator Number 15): Although this percentage is higher than last year, the percentage relates to only 6 children. Three of these children are siblings and are placed in a suitable but more distant placement with relatives.

3.6 Care Matters: Time for Change

The Corporate Parenting Group has taken the lead to ensure that the Council, together with its partners, continues to implement 'Care Matters: Time for Change' (DfES 2007), which was designed to improve outcomes for looked after children. In addition to the main Corporate Parenting Group, sub groups, such as the Educational Attainment sub group and Young People and Sexual Health sub group, meet as short term multi-agency meetings, to resolve any areas where there are problems.

This year the monitoring demonstrated that most of the services to improve outcomes were in place in the partnership, although some of the outcomes for looked after children, e.g. in educational attainment compared to their peers, are proving difficult to achieve (as they are nationally). Examples of the way in which the partnership is working to improve outcomes includes:

- Health: Processes are now in place to address identified health issues, both physical and emotional, concerning the needs of LAC. Following a recent initiative, the outturns for health assessments completed on time will improve, but continue to be monitored by CPG. This will ensure issues are identified early so they do not impede the looked after child unnecessarily. The continuing co-operation of partners, Health, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Specialist Services, ensures continuous improvement with the earlier help available for emotional problems of LAC.
- Education: The performance of LAC is below the average for all children. Performance varies considerably each year because of the small cohort. Southend is trying to ensure that LAC are given an early boost – through the introduction of an Early Years personal education plan (PEP). This year 14 young people in the Leaving Care Service are attending university, this has been an improving trend year on year.
- V4All: Looked After Young People are consulted and can effect changes in services designed for them. They have recently been fully involved in designing the Children's Partnership's pledge to looked after children.

In June 2010 a Looked After Children's Achievement Celebration event was successfully held which was attended by over 100 children, young people, carers, families, partners and councillors.

3.8 Key challenges for the next year, over and above sustaining our improvements include:

- The appointment of the Designated Paediatrician for Looked after Children which remains vacant.
- The completion of the commissioned CAMHS strategy for LAC.
- The continued and increased involvement and influence of children in care over policy, service design and in interviews for staff.
- Improving the educational attainment of looked after children that will be helped by having a virtual head teacher in post continuously and by the early introduction of personal education plans for pre school age children ensuring that they are ready to learn when starting school.

4. Other Options

There are no other options to consider in relation to this report.

5. Reasons for Recommendations

Not applicable.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities

This report contributes to the Council's priority to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people and is linked to the Children and Young People's Plan 2010-2013.

6.2 Financial Implications

This report has no financial implications.

6.2 Legal Implications

As the culmination of the Care Matters initiative the Department for Education issued a new legal framework which includes 'Care Planning for Looked After Children and Care Leavers' as part of the implementation of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008. This framework includes the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, Sufficiency Guidance, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) handbook, Short Breaks, Planning, Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers and Local Authority responsibilities towards former looked after children in custody. These regulations are being implemented from April 1st 2011 and will have an impact on the work with looked after children which the CPG will need to monitor.

6.4 People Implications

Delivering high quality outcomes for children in care requires commitment right across the partnership. Partners demonstrate this through their contribution to the Corporate Parenting Group, which is a sub-group within the Children's Partnership. Particular workforce challenges remain in recruiting and retaining qualified and experienced social work staff on the front line and continuous attention is paid to implementing the workforce strategy to achieve a fully staffed workforce.

6.5 Property Implications

Not applicable

6.6 Consultation

There has been no specific consultation on this report. However Voice4All and Southend Foster Families Council continue to inform the Corporate Parenting Group, and the Executive Member, of areas they wish to see change or develop.

6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

The needs of children in care are diverse. There is a higher population of significantly disabled children and those with special educational needs (25% of all LAC). White British children are over represented in the care population compared to other ethnicities in Southend's population. There are more boys than girls in care.

6.8 Risk Assessment

The numbers of looked after children is a key risk contained in the corporate risk register. The actions taken to control this risk are currently effective.

6.9 Value for Money

Over the last 5 years the numbers of LAC have shown a steady decline. Internal supply of places in foster care has grown and the numbers of children placed in external provision has shown a proportionately greater decline than the numbers overall. As a result savings have been secured each year from this budget.

6.10 Community Safety Implications

Not applicable

6.11 Environmental Impact

Not applicable

7. Background Papers

None

8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1 - Annual progress against national and local indicators for children in care.

CORPORATE PARENTING GROUP - MONTHLY PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

Ref no.	NI	Description	2009/10 Outturn	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec 2010	DEC 2009	Target 2010/11
a	61	The percentage of looked after children adopted in the year, who were placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision that they should be placed for adoption and who remained in that placement on adoption	80.0%	100%	100%	100%	85.7%	85.7%	77.8%	80%
b	62	Percentage of LAC with 3 placements or more	13.5%	5.3%	6.7%	7.8%	9.2%	9.9%	10.8%	10%
c	63	The percentage of looked after children aged under 16 at 31st March 2009 who had been looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years who were living in the same placement for at least 2 years, or are placed for adoption and their adoptive placement together with their previous placement together last for at least 2 years	75.2%	78.1%	76.3%	69.8%	68.8%	66.7%	73.7%	75%
d	66	Reviews of looked after children completed within the timeframe	97.3%	96.2%	94.9%	93.0%	83.3%	82.0%	99.6%	98.9%
e	147	Care Leavers in suitable accommodation	94.7%	100%	100%	100%	100%	94.4%	92.9%	95%
f	148	Previously looked after children aged 19 who are in full time employment, education and training	84.2%	87.5%	77.8%	69.2%	66.7%	61.1%	85.7%	85%
g		Adoptions of children looked after (PAF C23)	6.0%	3.3%	4.1%	5.3%	6.9%	6.7%	5.6%	
h		Children who have been looked after for 12 months or more and have missed 25 days or more of school (NOT PAF C24)	11.7%	13.6%	0%	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	6.4%	
i		Percentage of LAC whose have had a PEP in the last 12 months	89.1%	84.6%	81.5%	84.0%		89.2%	81.9%	
j		Number of children who have received a fixed term exclusion (since 1st Sept 2010)	24		8			12		
k		Number of children who have received a permanent exclusion (since 1st Sept 2010)	0		0	0	0	0	0	
l		Children who have been looked after for at least 12 months who have an up to date health assessment	79.1%	81.0%		72.5%	76.3%	70.5%	72.4%	
m		Children who have been looked after for at least 12 months who have an up to date dentist visit	75.8%	60.5%		56%	56.6%	57%	71.0%	
n		Children who started to be looked after from 1st April 2010 and who have had their initial health assessment within 28 days of coming into care		0%	0%	0%	0%	4.1%		
o		Children who are currently looked after and have been looked after for at least 28 days who have had a health assessment in the last year (or 6 months if they are under 5 yrs old)	83.6%	69.8%		61.8%	63.1%	59.2%		
p		Percentage of children looked after who communicated their views to all statutory reviews (cumulative from 01/04/09)	95.2%	99.3%	99.4%	99.5%	99.5%	99.5%	95.3%	
q		Children starting to be looked after and placed more than 20 miles from home (cumulative from 01/04/09)	9.4%	6.9%	5.7%	4.9%	7.5%	13.3%	6.5%	

r	Numbers of Looked After Children	267	269	268	268	260	267	270	260
s	Unallocated Looked After Children (no Social Worker)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
t	Number of looked after children placed for adoption	11	12	10	6	12	16	8	
u	Number of social worker posts currently occupied by agency staff	TBC		11			10		
v	Number of social care team manager or more senior posts currently occupied by agency staff	TBC		1			0		
w	Number of Looked After Children without a school place	2	0		0	0	0	2	