



CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

FINAL REPORT

**The Provision of Support and Services to Looked After
Children / Young People**

March 2012

CABINET

19 March 2012



Report of: Children’s Services Scrutiny Forum

Subject: FINAL REPORT INTO THE PROVISION OF SUPPORT AND SERVICES TO LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN / YOUNG PEOPLE

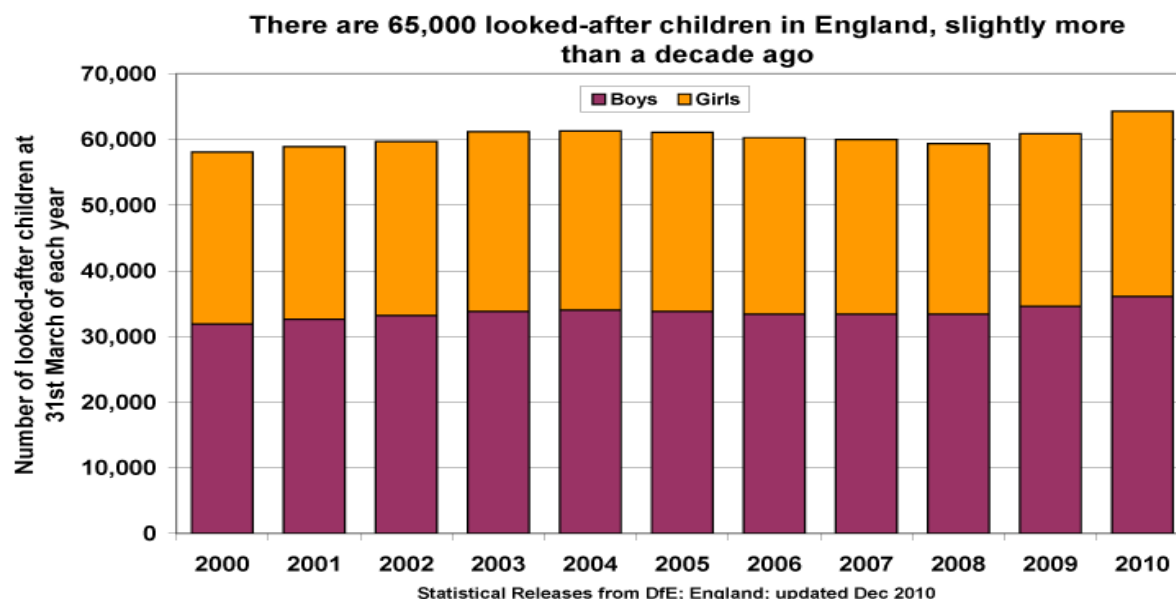
1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To present the findings of the Children’s Services Scrutiny Forum following its investigation into ‘The Provision of Support and Services to Looked After Children / Young People’.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 Children in the care of a local authority are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. The majority of children in care are there because they have suffered abuse or neglect. At any one time around 65,000 children are looked after in England, as shown in graph 1 below.

Graph 1 – Number of Looked After Children in England



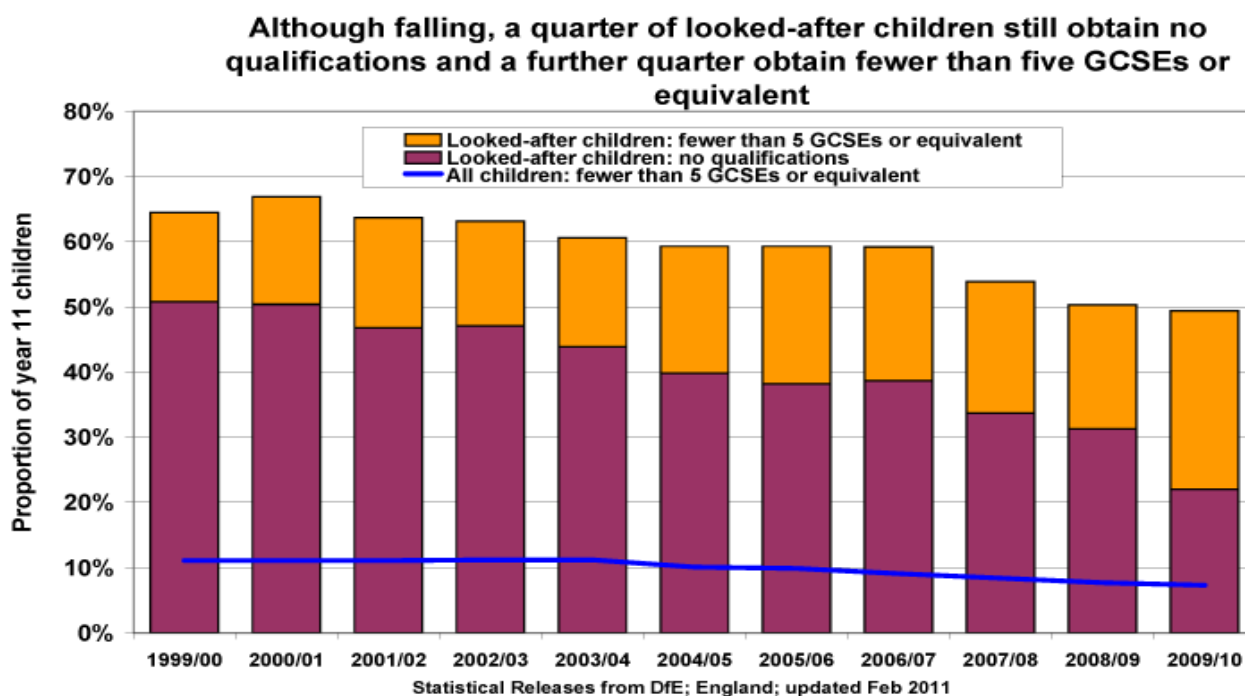
2.2 All Elected Members take on the role of ‘corporate parents’ to children looked after by their local authority. They have a duty to take an interest in the well-being and development of those children, as if they were their own children.

2.3 The term 'looked after children' includes:

- (a) Those children who are in care through a Care Order under Section 31 of the Children Act 1989;
- (b) Those accommodated on a voluntary basis through an agreement with their parents under Section 20 of that Act, or agreement with of the child if they are over 16;
- (c) Children placed away from home under an Emergency Protection Order (Section 44 of the Children Act); and
- (d) Children on police protection/remand/detention (Section 21 of the Children Act).

2.4 Most looked after children / young people are in foster care (73 per cent), some 10 per cent are in children's homes, the remaining are cared for in a number of different settings including residential schools and placement with parents. Although falling, a quarter of looked after children / young people still obtain no qualifications and a further quarter obtain fewer than five GCSEs or equivalent. A third of previously looked after children / young people are not in education, employment or training at age 19, as shown in graph 2 below.

Graph 2 – Educational Achievement of Looked After Children / Young People



2.5 As at 30 June 2011, 173 children and young people were looked after by Hartlepool Borough Council. Of the children looked after, 87% were placed in foster care, 8% were placed in residential care and 5% were placed with

parents (under a legal order). 58% of the children looked after were subject to a legal order, for example interim or full Care Order or Placement Order. The remainder were accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 at the request of/with the agreement of their parents. 19 children received family support via short break care where they received care as part of a plan; this support is usually provided to disabled children who receive short break care at Exmoor Grove. 70% of the children resided within the local authority boundary.

3. OVERALL AIM OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

- 3.1 To explore the range and provision of services and support for children and young people looked after by Hartlepool Borough Council

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

- 4.1 The following Terms of Reference for the investigation were agreed by the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum on 18 October 2011:-

(a) To gain an understanding of:-

- i) The profile of children and young people looked after by Hartlepool Borough Council (including age range covered);
- ii) Departmental responsibilities and services provided for looked after children / young people; and
- iii) The role of each Elected Member as a Corporate Parent.

(b) To explore how the Council can reduce the numbers of looked after children / young people.

(c) To explore how the Council and partner organisations support looked after children / young people across all aspects of their lives (clearly defining what is a statutory requirement and what the Council does over and above these requirements in terms of the provision of services and support) and in doing so evaluates:-

(1) *How well the Council does in commissioning or providing services for looked after children / young people, including in comparison with other similar authorities?*

(2) *How well do looked after children / young people do at school, both academically and in terms of other kind of achievements:*

(3) *How good is the health and wellbeing of children in care?*

(4) *How stable and secure are the lives of looked after children / young people while they are in care?*

- (5) *How well does the Council do at finding appropriate adoptive families for children for whom it is decided this is the right option?*
- (6) *How well do foster care arrangements work?*
- (7) *How good is the standard of any residential care provided or used by the Council?*
- (8) *What support does the Council provide to children / young people leaving care and how effective is it?*
- (9) *How effective is the professional workforce of social workers and others responsible for running services for and working with looked after children / young people?*
- (10) *What more could be done to fulfil the Council's responsibilities as a 'corporate parent'?*

(Questions from the Centre for Public Scrutiny Guidance on 10 Questions to ask if you're Scrutinising Services for Looked After Children)

- (d) To explore the views of looked after children / young people in relation to the services and support they receive.
- (e) To gain an understanding of the impact of current and future budget pressures on the way in which services for looked after children / young people are provided in Hartlepool.
- (f) To suggest ways of how support and services could be provided in the future to most effectively / efficiently meet the needs of looked after children / young people and promote improved outcomes.

5. MEMBERSHIP OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

5.1 Membership of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum for the 2011 / 12 Municipal Year was as outlined below:-

Councillors C Akers-Belcher (Chair), Fleet, Griffin, Ingham, Lauderdale, Maness, P Thompson, Wells and Wilcox (Vice-Chair).

(Councillor B Loynes, substitute for Councillor R Wells on occasions during the investigation)

Co-opted Members: Eira Ballingall and Sacha Paul Bedding.

Resident Representatives: Joan Steel

Young People's Representatives: Hanna Bew, Ashleigh Bostock, Bianca Gascoigne and Kim Henry

6. METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

- 6.1 The Members of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum met formally from the 18 October 2011 to 6 March 2012 to discuss and receive evidence directly relating to their investigation into 'The Provision of Support and Services to Looked After Children / Young People'. A detailed record of these meetings is available from the Council's Democratic Services or via the Hartlepool Borough Council website.
- 6.2 A brief summary of the methods of investigation are outlined below:-
- (a) Presentations from the Council's Child and Adult Services Department enhanced with verbal evidence
 - (b) Group exercises held with:-
 - (i) Partner organisations;
 - (ii) Foster carers;
 - (iii) Looked after young children and young people;
 - (iv) Social Workers; and
 - (v) Officers from the Child and Adult Services Department
 - (c) Verbal and written evidence from foster carers
 - (d) A presentation from looked after children and young people
 - (e) A presentation from South Tyneside Council

7. FINDINGS

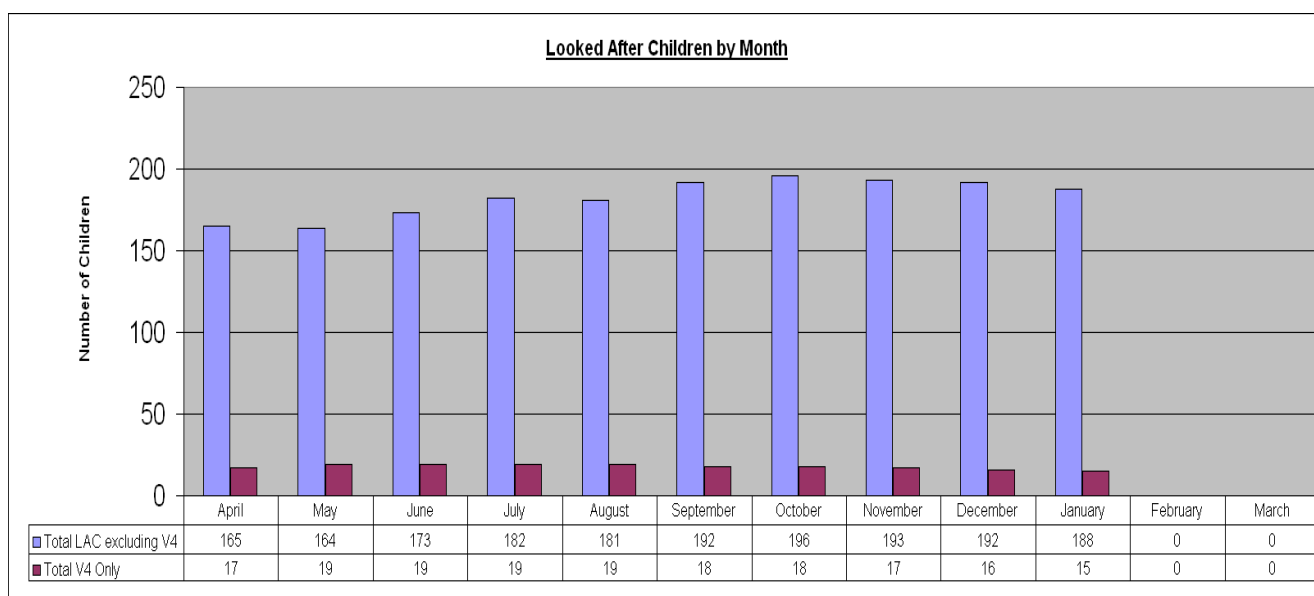
THE PROFILE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LOOKED AFTER BY HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL (INCLUDING AGE RANGE COVERED)

- 7.1 Members of the Forum were very interested to hear about the profile of children and young people looked after by Hartlepool Borough Council for the current year, 2011 / 12. The profiles were illustrated to Members using a variety of graphs and tables.

Evidence from the Child and Adult Services Department

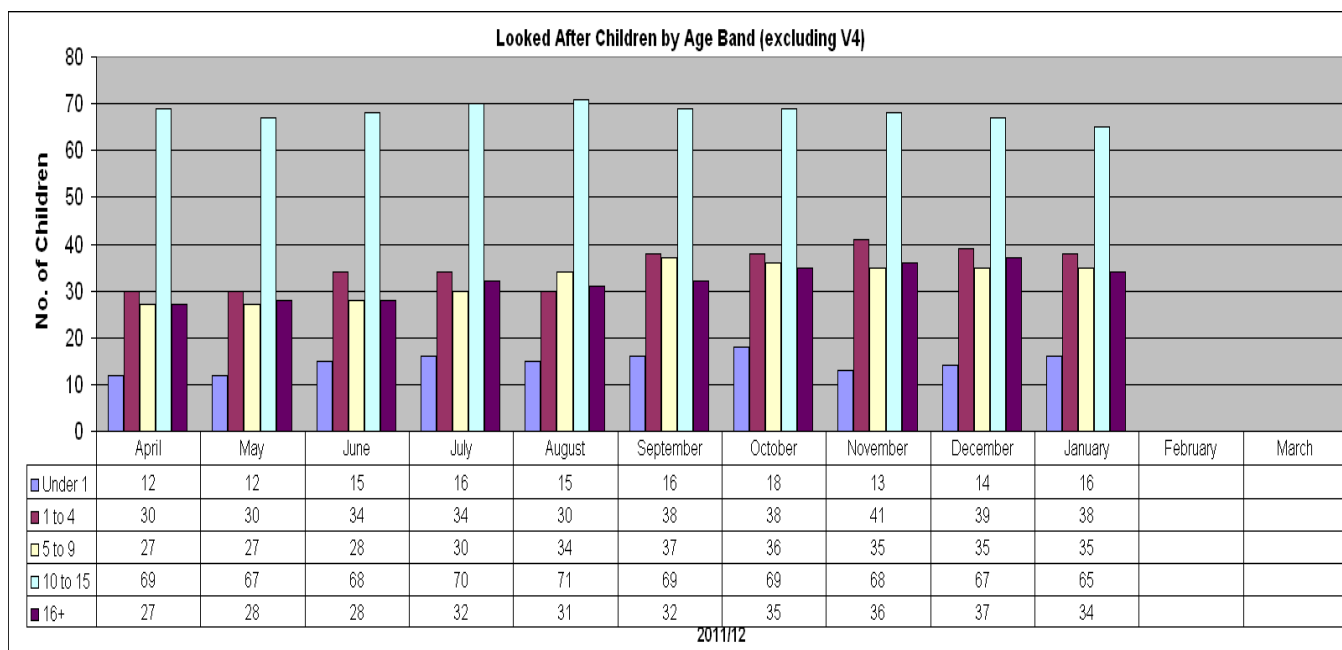
- 7.2 Table 1 details the numbers of children looked after by Hartlepool Borough Council from April 2011. The graph shows a rise in children looked after in June to August 2011. Members were informed that upon closer investigation, this was primarily due to large sibling groups becoming looked after.

Table 1 Numbers of looked after children and young people



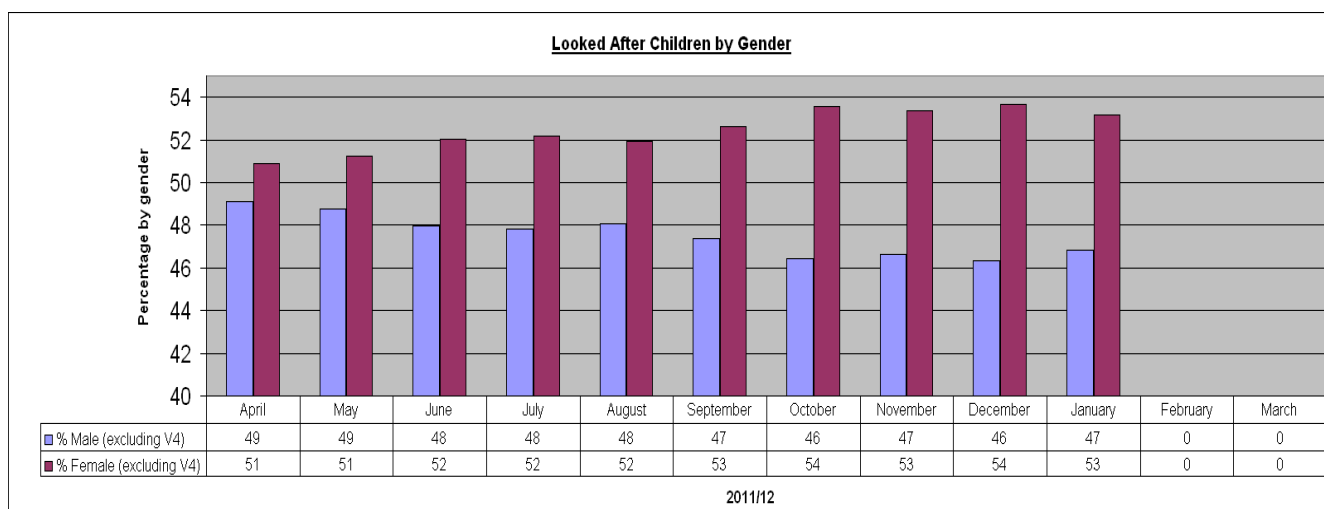
7.3 Table 2 details the age profile of children and young people looked after. The largest age grouping is the 10 to 15 age range which reflects those children and young people who are looked after in long term foster placements. Children in younger age bands often come into care, are subject to legal proceedings under the Children Act 1989, and leave care through either being placed for adoption or return to the care of their family.

Table 2 Age of looked after children and young people



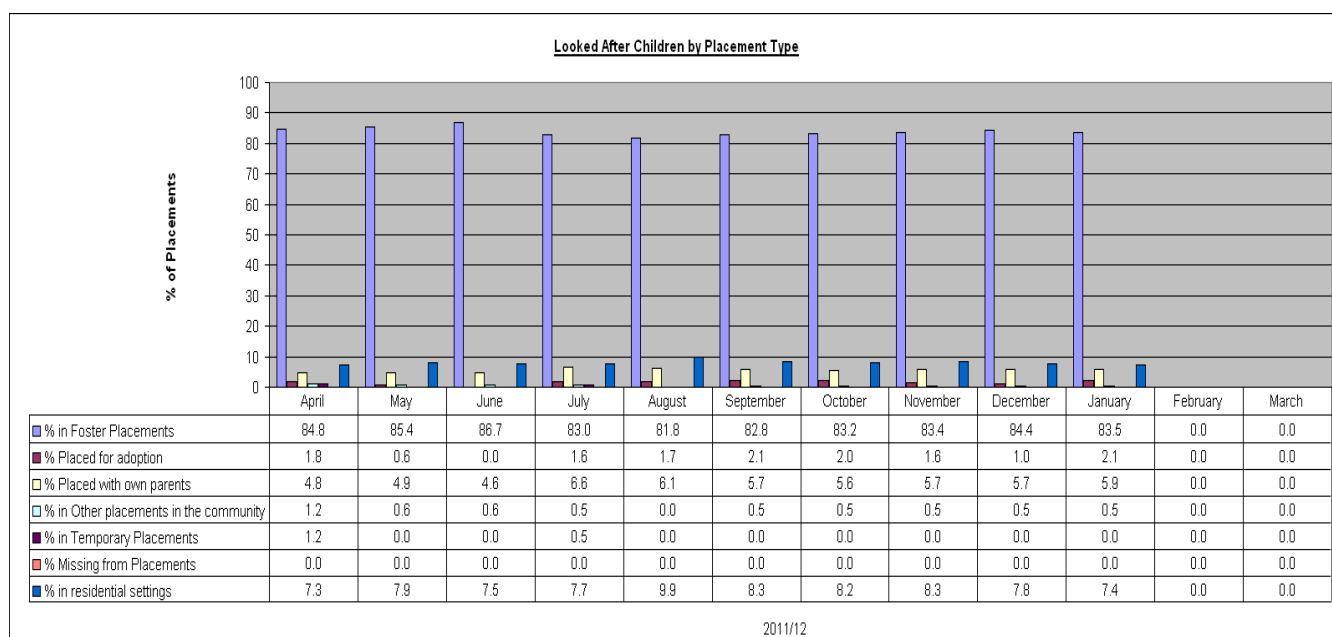
7.4 Table 3 details the gender profile of children and young people looked after.

Table 3 Gender of looked after children and young people



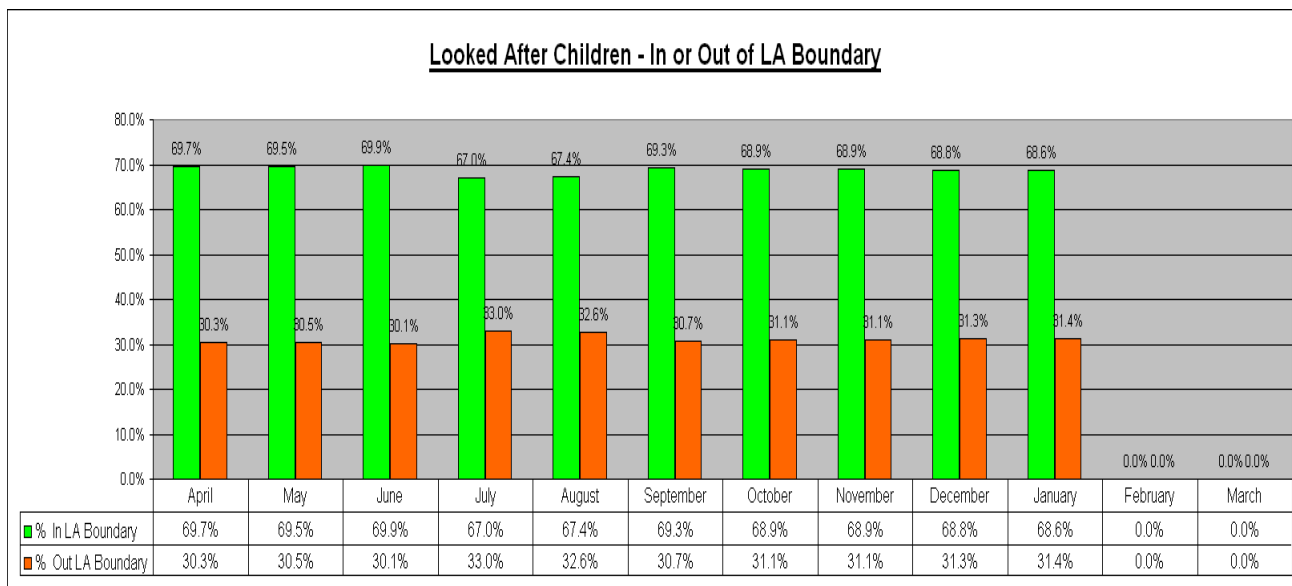
7.5 Table 4 provides details of the range and types of placements provided to children and young people looked after. The vast majority of children are placed in foster care delivered through the Council's foster care service. The Forum was informed that foster care provides children with a positive family living opportunity which in most instances is preferable to residential or group living situations. Hartlepool has been successful in recruiting foster carers which has enabled children and young people to remain resident within the authority. The Council's future recruitment strategy is aimed at recruiting more carers for older young people and sibling groups, ensuring that children can remain together. There are a small number of children and young people who are placed at home with their parents under a legal order. There are statutory regulations that govern these arrangements and usually are as a result of an order from the court or for some older young people as part of a planned reunification back to their family.

Table 4 Types of Placements



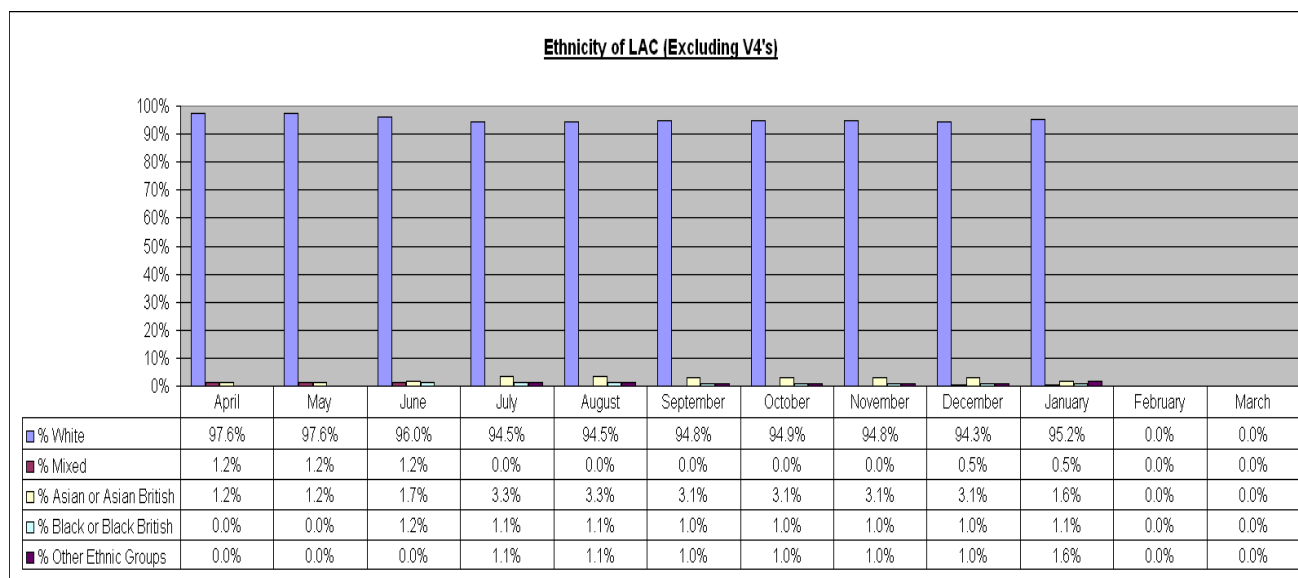
7.6 Table 5 shows the placements of children and young people within and outside of the Council boundary. The Council performs well in relation to maintaining children and young people within the boundary which supports continuity of education, family relationships, health care and social networks. Children and young people have a strong identity with the town. Members were pleased to hear that it is for all of these reasons that, where the Council are able to meet children and young people’s needs, the Council prioritise children and young people being placed locally.

Table 5 Placements within and outside Council Boundary



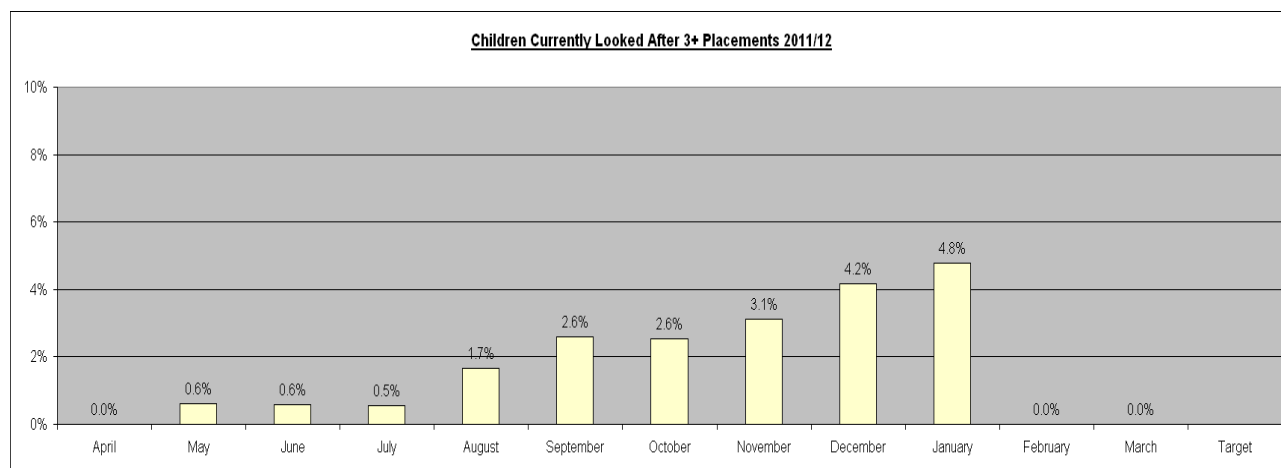
7.7 Table 6 details the ethnicity of children and young people. The Forum was informed that this profile is broadly in line with the ethnic population of Hartlepool, where 1.2% of the town population are of black or ethnic minority origin (2001 Census).

Table 6 Ethnicity of looked after children and young people



7.8 Table 7 outlines the performance of the Council in relation to stability of placements for looked after children and young people. Placement stability is a critical measurement of the quality of looked after services, as stability in placement supports education, health and well being and improved long term outcomes for children. The performance for the year to date is exceeding the target demonstrating good performance in this area.

Table 7 Stability of Placements



8. DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND SERVICES PROVIDED FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

8.1 The Forum was keen to examine and explore the services currently provided to looked after children and young people in Hartlepool. Members were pleased to receive evidence from the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services and Officers from the Child and Adult Services Department.

Evidence from the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services

8.2 The Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services was of the view that whilst there was always room for improvement, current services were delivered well with a high level of commitment from officers. The Portfolio Holder emphasised that services for looked after children and young people were needs led with the main priority being the child or young person.

8.3 The Forum expressed concern about the current academic achievement levels of looked after children and that looked after children and young people did not achieve as well academically compared to other children and young people. The Forum emphasised the need for the same level of support as their peer groups.

8.4 The Portfolio Holder referred to the recent Public Services White Paper which focuses on alternative methods of service delivery and he was pleased to report that Hartlepool was at the forefront of service delivery and was a comparator site for the social work practice pilot scheme to look at alternative ways of working.

- 8.5 To conclude, the Portfolio Holder emphasised the messages contained within the Munro report (2011). The importance of effectively communicating and taking on board the views and experiences of children and young people in the care system in order to successfully fulfil the role as a corporate parent was reiterated.

Evidence from the Child and Adult Services Department

- 8.6 In order to meet statutory requirements Hartlepool Borough Council provides services for looked after children through its dedicated 'Through Care Team'. Within the team, social work services are available to children and young people and these services promote positive parenting and provide consistency and stability.
- 8.7 The Safeguarding, Assessment and Support Teams provide town wide services for children and young people in need, including those in need of protection. Children and young people supported by this team are likely to be in care for a short period of time, for example, being placed for adoption or for older young people, a move into independent living.
- 8.8 Members queried the low levels of adoptions nationally and whether this was comparable in Hartlepool. Members were informed that in 2011, 11% of looked after children were adopted nationally. The percentage for Hartlepool for the same period was 19% which was also above the North East average of 15% (note the small cohort sizes). 75% of the children adopted in Hartlepool were placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision date. The average for the North East region was 74.7% and nationally 74.0%. The figures are attached as **Appendix 1**.
- 8.9 The dedicated looked after nurse role is an integrated part of the 'Through Care Team'. The nurse promotes health and well being, advice, support and intervention. The nurse is a qualified nurse practitioner and is able to prescribe medication, smoking cessation and about to embark on a sexual health course.
- 8.10 The Council commissions a service from Tees, Esk and Wear Valley Foundation Trust to provide a dedicated Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) for children and young people looked after. Services range from mental health assessments and diagnosis, delivering therapeutic interventions and supporting the emotional health and well being of children and young people. In addition to this, a service is also offered to staff and carers through consultation, training and support.
- 8.11 It is the ethos of Hartlepool Borough Council that looked after children and young people should have the same opportunities to develop and learn as other children and young people. Services are committed to promoting success for children both in learning and in life. The Council has a nominated Virtual School Head who has a duty and responsibility to monitor the educational attainment and progress of all looked after children and young people, attending any school or educational provision. Also, a dedicated

looked after children's School Inclusion Co-ordinator provides advice and support to teachers within schools, children and carers and tracks attainment to ensure services and support are targeted to those who need it. All schools have designated teachers for looked after children in line with statutory requirements.

- 8.12 All looked after children and young people have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which is a statutory requirement within a child's care plan. The social worker has the legal responsibility for initiating the plan but it is essential that the class teacher or designated teacher is an integral part of the process to ensure the assessment and targets are correct and that the school have sufficient resources to develop and implement the plan.
- 8.13 A named Personal Advisor from the Integrated Youth Support Service is attached to the Through Care Team to ensure that all young people preparing to leave school have access to good careers advice to engage young people in further education, training or employment. This support is available to the young person up until 21 years of age.
- 8.14 Within the review process, Independent Reviewing Officers ensure that children and young people are given every opportunity to pursue existing or new activities and hobbies, just as parents would do for their own children. Examples of opportunities include residential activities aimed at developing self confidence, self esteem and team building. Hartlepool Borough Council is committed to encouraging children and young people to pursue their interests and talents and receive support and guidance to pursue their goals and aspirations.
- 8.15 It is essential that young people are kept safe and Hartlepool Borough Council adheres to a strict regulatory framework which ensures strict vetting of all staff and service providers working with looked after children.
- 8.16 With the support of a Participation Worker and in line with statutory requirements, the Council developed a Pledge to looked after children in 2009 and also a Children in Care Council. The Pledge is attached as **Appendix 2**. The Children in Care Council now operates a Junior Council and another for older looked after children. The children and young people are very committed and enthusiastic about their work. They have represented the authority at local, regional and national events and are a credit to the Council. Two members of the group attend the Corporate Parent Forum and a joint meeting between the Children in Care Council and the Corporate Parenting Forum is being arranged. The focus of this meeting will be to monitor the implementation of the Pledge ensuring the Council is held to account on its commitments in the Pledge and service development for looked after children as a whole. It is important that the Council are able to learn from the experiences from young people to ensure that the Council constantly strive to improve services for them.

- 8.17 Members were informed that Hartlepool Borough Council has one children's residential unit providing short break care for children and young people with disabilities.
- 8.18 The Council commissions independent residential placements for children and young people when this care provision is needed. Placements are identified on the capacity of the organisation to meet the child or young person needs and all appropriate safeguarding enquiries are in place prior to a placement commencing.
- 8.19 The service aim is to provide quality placements that meet individual needs of a child or young person, where carers are able to develop trusting, caring relationships which will support children and young people and keep them safe.
- 8.20 In response to the evidence received from the Child and Adult Services Department, Members questioned whether data had been collected in relation to post care outcomes of looked after children and young people once they had left the care system. Data of this type was not retained in relation to post adoption children but the data collected to date is attached as **Appendix 3**.
- 8.21 Members agreed that placement stability is arguably the single most important factor influencing positive outcomes for children looked after and as such it is a priority for the Council. The placement choice for a child or young person is vital to promoting stability and achieving positive outcomes. Hartlepool has a robust permanency planning model which will include, prior to making a permanent placement, facilitating a 'Child Appreciation Day' to ensure carers fully understand the needs of the child, are prepared for the placement and appropriate support is in place prior to a child moving to live with a new family. The recent development of the Placement Support Team provides additional support and training to foster carers to promote placement stability. This work includes, working with foster carers own children and looked after children through group work and individual one to one support. The support team provides intensive wrap around support to placements in crisis.

9. THE ROLE OF EACH ELECTED MEMBER AS A CORPORATE PARENT

- 9.1 Members of the Forum took their role as corporate parents very seriously and welcomed evidence from the Child and Adult Services Department on corporate parenting.

Evidence from the Child and Adult Services Department

- 9.2 Members were informed that Corporate Parenting is the challenge laid down to local authorities by the Government. "Corporate parenting" is the term used to describe the local authority's duties and responsibilities to children and young people who are in care or are care leavers. The central principle of corporate parenting is that the local authority should parent and seek the same outcomes for children and young people in their care in the same way they would parent their own children.

- 9.3 The vision is to ensure that every looked after child in Hartlepool experiences high quality care and stable relationships and is nurtured and grows up with a sense of identity and belonging. Children in care should feel their needs are given the highest priority and that they are valued and cared about not only by those who look after them on a daily basis but also by those who make decisions politically and operationally in the town.
- 9.4 Like most other authorities, Hartlepool has created a Corporate Parent Forum. It is a properly constituted Council meeting, chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services with a range of Councillors as members. In addition, there are two foster carer representatives, two young people representatives from the Young Person's Council and relevant officers in attendance. The forum has an annual plan of reporting which is currently being reviewed to facilitate joint meetings with the Children in Care Council. These reporting arrangements provide the Corporate Parent Forum with the opportunity to challenge how services are delivered to children in care and measure whether they are achieving desired outcomes. The Corporate Parenting Forum has a pivotal role in listening to the voices of children and young people in care, speaking out on their behalf and being aspirational to make sure that future generations in Hartlepool grow up happy, healthy, with stable relationships and a first class education. The Corporate Parent Forum must strive to achieve this by challenging officers on the services provided, the performance of the Council against key performance indicators for looked after children and listening to the experiences of children in care. At its most effective, the Corporate Parent Forum in partnership with the Children in Care Council drives the change agenda to achieve the vision laid out within the Council's Looked After Strategy and holds officers of the Council and wider partners to account.
- 9.5 The Council has a Multi Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP) which brings together agencies who have a responsibility to deliver services to children looked after. This partnership meets every two months and works to an action plan that is agreed at the beginning of each year. The action plan priorities require multi agency engagement but a considerable proportion of the work relates to the services delivered by the local authority. Many of the priorities for the MALAP flow from the Children Looked After Strategy but the tasks are much more detailed for this partnership and it is expected that they can be achieved within a single year.

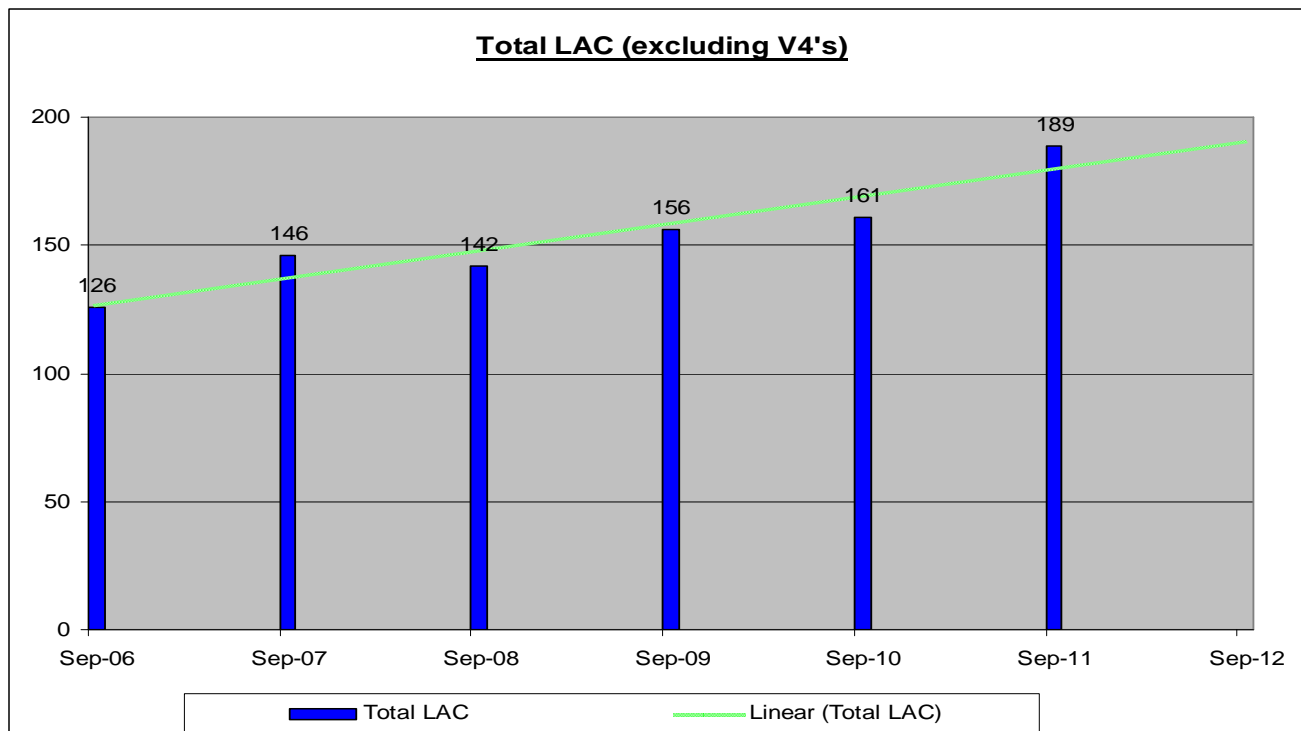
10. HOW CAN THE COUNCIL REDUCE THE NUMBERS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN / YOUNG PEOPLE

- 10.1 The numbers of looked after children in Hartlepool are increasing. Analysis was undertaken to look into the significant increase in June 2011 and Members were advised that it was due to two large sibling groups being taken into care. Never the less, Members support opportunities and initiatives to reduce the number of looked after children and welcomed evidence from officers from the Child and Adult Services department on future plans.

Evidence from the Child and Adult Services Department

10.2 The graph below show the increase in the numbers of looked after children and young people.

Table 8 Increase in Numbers of looked after children and young people (2006 – 2012)



10.3 Members believed that better early intervention services could also be contributing to the rise, as more children and young people are being identified as at risk.

10.4 One initiative to reduce the number of looked after children is the support foster care scheme. This pilot scheme aims to provide intensive support to families and children and young people who are on the edge of care this support could include the provision of support foster care for 2 or 3 nights per week. The Forum raised concerns that the proposal to reduce the number of children looked after by developing a support foster care scheme to enable children to remain in the family home could potentially increase the risks to the child. The Assistant Director of Safeguarding and Specialist Services provided assurances that the proposal to strengthen provision of support to children on the edge of care by preventing family breakdown would only be utilised in such circumstances where the child was not considered to be at risk of harm. It was highlighted to Members that there was a statutory duty upon the local authority to do as much as possible to maintain a child in the family home, however, where there was a clear risk to the child, arrangements were in place to take decisive action to protect them.

11. HOW THE COUNCIL AND PARTNER ORGANISATIONS SUPPORT LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN / YOUNG PEOPLE ACROSS ALL ASPECTS OF THEIR LIVES

- 11.1 As part of this investigation, the Forum at its meeting of 23 November 2011 split into small groups to gather views from looked after children; foster carers; partner organisations; and officers from the Child and Adult Services Department including social workers on how looked after children / young people are supported across all aspects of their lives. Several organisations attended including Cleveland Police; Housing Hartlepool; Hartlepool College of Further Education; a General Practitioner; Young Foundations; and representatives from the NHS. Several foster carers and looked after young people attended and contributed to the discussions.
- 11.2 The Forum and attendees split into small groups and explored four key areas, Corporate Parenting; Placements; Health and Housing; and Education. The complete feedback from this exercise is attached as **Appendix 4**. The comments are listed alongside each of the questions that were asked with a column outlining the suggestions for improvement which were made. In addition to the feedback, written views were also submitted and are attached to the feedback. A summary of the key points from each of the groups is highlighted below.

Group 1 – Health and Housing

- 11.3 The Group discussed the physical health monitoring process of children in care and access to the looked after children dedicated nurse. It was noted that 90% of health assessments were completed in the timescales and children looked after were aware of the process for accessing such services.
- 11.4 The emotional wellbeing and mental health of looked after children was debated including the process for measuring emotional and mental health issues. The need to continue to develop a multi-agency approach was emphasised.
- 11.5 In discussions regarding the standard of residential care provided, the group referred to difficulties in relation to sustaining tenancies, the reasons for failed tenancies, the need to extend joint working and liaise with a range of housing providers with a view to addressing these problems. The lack of residential provision in Hartlepool for young people was noted. It was suggested that young people should be encouraged and supported to remain in their carer provision until they are prepared and ready to leave and certainly not at aged 16 years. The group acknowledged that some young people are not ready to live independently at 18 and supported accommodation should be available to a young person up until they are ready to live independently / sustain a tenancy.

Group 2 – Corporate Parenting

- 11.6 The need to ensure that placements were appropriate to meet the needs of the child was highlighted. The importance of questioning whether it was appropriate to place a child outside the town as well as consider the impact of placements outside the area and how best to reintegrate children into an area as part of adulthood was emphasised by the group.
- 11.7 In terms of security and stability of looked after children, the group discussed the importance of suitable matching and the potential impact of emergency foster placements.
- 11.8 In considering what more could be done to fulfil the Council's responsibilities as a corporate parent, the group emphasised the need to question whether the level of support for a looked after child would be acceptable for their own child and emphasised the benefits of placing siblings together.

Group 3 – Education

- 11.9 Statistical information was provided which indicated that outcomes for looked after young people at key stage 2 (end of year 6) and key stage 4 were significantly lower than their peers. It was noted that four looked after young people were currently studying at university.
- 11.10 Reference was made to tracking information which indicated the level of attainment on the date the child or young person became looked after to the level of attainment on the date they left the system as a comparator, which suggested that the majority of young people were making progress. School attendance levels of looked after children had improved year on year since 2006.
- 11.11 A looked after young person shared her experiences with the group highlighting that being looked after had a significant impact on her education. She felt that as a looked after child she was singled out at school and suggested that any meetings in relation to personal circumstances should be held out of school hours to maintain confidentiality and schools should provide an individual they could talk to.
- 11.12 In relation to post 16 education, whilst the Hartlepool College of Further Education was not officially advised of details of looked after children, as a result of the recent removal of the education maintenance allowance and the need to apply for a bursary this information was no longer confidential. Whilst the improvements in attendance figures were noted, it was stated that further improvements were necessary.
- 11.13 With regard to support mechanisms, it was noted that effective support mechanisms were in place for children looked after when problems arose. The benefits of monitoring Personal Education Plans to provide clarity in terms of funding availability were outlined. Social Workers indicated that their role was key in supporting improvements in education attainment and the

potential benefits as a result. The need for settled placements and to improve links with foster carers to ensure young people were placed at the right schools was highlighted. It was considered that changes in social workers affected performance in school.

Group 4 – Placements

- 11.14 The Forum was advised that the number of children planned for adoption was rising and the number of adopters was reducing nationally. The methods of addressing this issue were outlined, which included a recent successful advertising campaign which resulted in an increase in adopters for Hartlepool. One of the measures was finding the right match and reference was made to Hartlepool's success in the adoption process. One of the main issues identified was the need to support carers to accommodate sibling groups with complex needs.
- 11.15 The approval and matching process was discussed including the need for improved links with the adoption team.
- 11.16 In relation to how well the current foster care arrangements worked, arrangements were in place to ensure appropriate levels of support were available. However, the benefits of appointing a second point of contact in the event that the link worker was not available was suggested. In relation to sharing information, the need to publicise the 24 hour support service and improve communication methods with foster carers was highlighted. The group noted the detrimental impact legal proceedings placed on looked after children.
- 11.17 In relation to the support provided by the Council to young people leaving foster care, the need for improvement was acknowledged as well as the need to co-ordinate services and ensure the appropriate skills were available to move onto adulthood.
- 11.18 Members were astonished that not all foster carers took their fostered child or young person on holiday with them. Members believed that fostering was about integrating that child or young person into the family. Members felt strongly that becoming a foster carer was a life style choice and vocation and not simply a 'job'. Members suggested that before approval is granted for a person to become a foster carer, the question should be asked whether they are willing to take the child or young person on their family holiday. If yes, then they would be suitable for long term placements, if no, then they would be suitable for short term placements. Members did not believe that leaving a child or young person in respite care while their foster carers went on a family holiday was acceptable practice.
- 12. THE VIEWS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN / YOUNG PEOPLE IN RELATION TO THE SERVICES AND SUPPORT THEY RECEIVE**

- 12.1 Members welcomed looked after children and young people along to their meeting of 31 January 2012. The looked after children and young people delivered a very detailed presentation focusing on the following questions:-
- (a) What do you like about being looked after in care?
 - (b) What don't you like about being looked after in care?
 - (c) Is there anything which would have made coming into care easier for you? What would have made your time in care easier?
 - (d) If you were able to change the care system, what things would you change?
- 12.2 Members of the Forum were delighted to hear the children's and young people's views which were very informative and covered a number of issues both positive and negative. All the young people's views are attached as **Appendix 5**.
- 12.3 One of the main areas of concern highlighted by the children and young people was the separation of siblings and staying in contact with siblings when fostered or adopted. Officers did confirm that that where possible siblings were placed together but unfortunately there were some instances where this was not appropriate or space was limited in a foster family. Regular contact between siblings was encouraged with foster families. Clarification was sought by the Forum on the arrangements for contact where siblings were separated through adoption. The Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Specialist Services confirmed whilst that the Council would aim to broker an agreement for contact between siblings who lived separately, the adoptive parents had the authority to veto contact should they choose to do so unless an appropriate court order was in place. However, the fact that the local authority would provide support to enable the adopted child or young person to have direct contact with family members was included as part of the training and preparation to become adoptive parents. Members of the Forum stressed the importance of placing siblings together and were pleased to hear that the payment system for foster carers takes into account situations where three or more siblings are placed together as it is often a more difficult situation to manage.
- 12.4 One young person referred to 'being picked up from school with no warning', which they did not like. Members asked why this would happen and were assured that this would only happen in exceptional cases where there were serious child protection issues. Under normal circumstances, taking a child into care was planned in a way that was in the best interests of that child.
- 12.5 The Forum asked the children and young people how often they had contact with their social worker. Some young people said on a daily basis and some said weekly or monthly. In general, the opinion was that children and young people can arrange their contact arrangements on what they feel is necessary. Members were informed that the Council had adopted a minimum

requirement of contact every month, although this was flexible and the child or young person could contact their social worker more or less if required, which was confirmed by the children and young people who attended the meeting.

- 12.6 Members asked the young people whether they had contact cards for their social workers and the answer was yes. However, the card did not include details of the Emergency Duty Team, which operated outside normal Monday to Friday, 9 to 5 working hours. It was suggested by Members that all children and young people who were looked after should be personally introduced to members of the Emergency Duty Team to ensure they did not feel like they were contacting strangers with their problems. The children and young people thought that this was a good idea and also having contact details for an appropriate alternative contact on the cards.
- 12.7 Members were pleased to hear that children and young people had a chance to say whether they were happy with a placement that was being offered to them, with introductions and visits made before the commencement of the placement. Every effort was made to ensure the stability of the first placement as moving children from one placement to another was very disruptive for everyone. However, if a child indicated they were unhappy within a placement, alternative placements would be explored.
- 12.8 A concern was raised by Members of the Forum in relation to a comment made by one of the young people about friends' families having to undergo a Criminal Records Bureau check. Members were pleased to hear that this practice was stopped in 2001. Foster carer's act as the parents for the child or young person and base decisions on their own judgement.

13. THE IMPACT OF CURRENT AND FUTURE BUDGET PRESSURES ON THE WAY IN WHICH SERVICES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN / YOUNG PEOPLE ARE PROVIDED IN HARTLEPOOL

- 13.1 Members were keen to examine the impact of current and future budget pressures in relation to services provided for looked after children and young people.

Evidence from the Child and Adult Services Department

- 13.2 Members heard that as part of the 2012 / 2013 budget proposals a savings target of £348,000 was to be achieved by reducing the level of expenditure on commissioned services whilst continuing to maintain high quality provision for children in need and children looked after. The following objectives were established for the review:

- (a) To commission cost effective, high quality care placements for children;
- (b) To reduce divisional expenditure on commissioned services;
- (c) To ensure all commissioned services are effective, efficient and deliver value for money;
- (d) To explore alternative delivery models and how effective and sustainable they are; and

(e) To ensure risk is effectively managed.

13.3 Members were informed that wherever possible, looked after children and young people were placed within Council resources, with 70.9% of children placed with foster carers approved by the Council.

13.4 The budget for each area was presented to the Forum and is detailed below.

Table 9: Budget area and budget allocation

BUDGET AREA	BUDGET
In house foster care/allowances Residence Order/Special Guardianship	£2,624,575
Agency foster care	£1,021,681
Agency residential care	£1,235,104
Other commissioned services	£287,269
TOTAL	£5,168,629

13.5 Therefore, in order to realise the savings the Council challenged providers on their statutory responsibility, for example, the nurse for looked after children and young people is a statutory responsibility of the PCT therefore the Council has ceased to contribute. Assurances were sought that when the PCT ceased to exist, the Looked After Children Nurse position would be retained and that this arrangement had been referred to the new Clinical Commissioning Group and endorsed by the Health and Wellbeing Board. A number of posts had been reviewed and / or deleted. Savings had been realised from cost centres with uncommitted balances and the review of commissioned services identified savings of £267k. In addition to this a review of the divisional management structure contributed to the savings.

13.6 The training budget for children’s services is £165,869 with the proposal to discontinue the annual secondment to the degree in social work. This proposal is based on the fact that there are a high number of social work graduates looking for posts and this is likely to continue. The use of training venues has been reviewed and the newly qualified social worker programme has been brought in house. There is a feasibility study underway regarding Tees workforce development and joint commissioning of high cost training events with external facilitators.

13.7 The Forum was informed that that there was no scope to reduce in house foster care. The average cost of an in house foster placement is £362 per child, per week compared to £1,034 per child, per week for an independent foster placement.

13.8 In relation to residential care provision, it was reported that there was no Council residential provision and all residential care was commissioned

through the independent sector. The average cost of a commissioned placement was £3,068 with a projected cost of delivering the service in house at £3,682. A full detailed breakdown of how the figure of £3,682 for in-house residential provision was provided for Members information and is attached as **Appendix 6** along with details of the costs from the independent and voluntary sector as a comparator.

- 13.9 In addition, it was suggested by Members that the costs of utilising a Council owned building or a building currently included on the asset transfer list for this purpose should be considered and also low cost borrowing.

Site Visits to the Star Centre, an Independent Providers Children's Home and a Council run Children's Home

- 13.10 As part of the evidence gathering process for the undertaking of this investigation, Members of the Forum attended a site visit on 12 December 2011 to The Star Centre, formerly a children's home. The Centre is now used to work creatively with children and young people in care, their carers and other professionals to achieve positive outcomes. Members were of the opinion that the building was run down and did not feel homely.
- 13.11 The Independent providers children's home in Hartlepool was a large detached property with occupancy for three children / young people. Members considered the home to be too large for its purpose and were of the opinion that it did not feel homely as it was in the middle of redecoration. There were a number maintenance issues in and around the building and Members were informed that maintenance was undertaken separately and was not the role of the staff within the home. Members highlighted that this was not the standard that they would want for their looked after children and young people.
- 13.12 The Children's Home in Stockton was a 4 bedroom terraced property ran by Stockton Borough Council. Members considered the home to be very homely and the impression Members were given was that the children living in the home were being looked after by a 'house mother' who took charge whilst working under the ethos of a foster care family. In addition to this, the home was spotlessly clean. Members considered that the success of such an operation was linked to having the right staff in place who considered this type of employment to be a vocation as opposed to a job.
- 13.13 Members felt very strongly that the Council should own and run one or more, three to four bedroom children's home(s) to enable looked after children and young people to remain within their home town. It was suggested that the option of 'selling' one of the beds to another local authority may subsidise the operational costs of running the home.
- 13.14 Members were of the opinion that Hartlepool could learn from the way the children's home provision was run in Stockton and believed that this should be the vision for Hartlepool.

14. WAYS OF HOW SUPPORT AND SERVICES COULD BE PROVIDED IN THE FUTURE TO MOST EFFECTIVELY / EFFICIENTLY MEET THE NEEDS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN / YOUNG PEOPLE AND PROMOTE IMPROVED OUTCOMES

- 14.1 The Forum was pleased to receive evidence from a statistical neighbouring authority, South Tyneside. The Head of Children and Families Social Care at South Tyneside attended a meeting of the Forum to discuss the provision of support and services to children and young people looked after by South Tyneside Council and also innovative ways of working.

Evidence from South Tyneside Council

- 14.2 Members were informed that looked after children and child protection / safeguarding issues inter-relate and that they are both at the top end of the responses that the Council offer. A child or young person may move from child protection to being looked after. For both services the Council aim to provide focused and purposeful intervention to enable the child to live with, or return to their own family in a safe and caring environment. However, if this is not possible, the aim is to secure a stable long term alternative, ideally adoption.

- 14.3 South Tyneside is very similar in terms of numbers for both looked after children and young people and children and young people who are subject to a child protection plan.

- 14.4 Members noted that review mechanisms were in place for all team managers with responsibilities for looked after children to discuss all cases individually and each are challenged on how each case is progressing. As with all local authorities, the challenge is to reduce the number of looked after children, and the Head of Children and Families Social Care believed that this reduction would be achieved by prevention, with the need to get the whole system running well, not just parts of it, including preventative services. Members were informed that looked after children and young people will have the best outcomes if the following are achieved:-

- (a) Stability of placement and community based, ideally early adoption where possible;
- (b) Education to gain good qualifications;
- (c) Preparation for independence, which involves good planning and emotional resilience;
- (d) Stable accommodation while looked after and good quality accommodation when leaving care along with support if needed; and
- (e) Employment or continue in education

- 14.5 The Forum was keen to examine the fostering arrangement in South Tyneside. The Head of Children and Families Social Care identified the key elements of their success in this area:-

- (a) well-resourced team, which is cost effective;

- (b) continuous recruitment to cover for retirement, burn out or becoming adopters; and
 - (c) high quality support
- 14.6 These elements have allowed for the reduction in the use of external fostering agencies, which has resulted in a significant saving in excess of £700k.
- 14.7 In relation to support for care leavers, South Tyneside's leaving care service has established close relationships with:-
 - (a) training providers – care leavers are seen as a priority;
 - (b) education providers;
 - (c) local authority economic regeneration;
 - (d) South Tyneside Homes for accommodation and support; and
 - (e) Other accommodation providers for a range of tenancies.
- 14.8 The Head of Children and Families Social Care highlighted that in view of the current budgetary challenges faced by South Tyneside Council, a number of innovative ways of providing services and proposing savings had been implemented which included:-
 - (a) implementing a front door multi agency panel to establish a multi agency approach;
 - (b) a review of new birth procedures;
 - (c) reconfiguration of children's centres way of working;
 - (d) challenged the Primary Care Trust about the funding for placements with success;
 - (e) driven down agency foster care costs resulting in savings in excess of £459k;
 - (f) have no agency social work staff because South Tyneside recruit 3 or 4 over number to ensure no gaps in service provision;
 - (g) recruitment of career foster carers; and
 - (h) recruiting staff to become foster carers who are at risk of redundancy;
- 14.9 Members queried the career foster care initiative. The Head of Children and Families Social Care explained using an example. Officers from within the Youth Offending Service were approached to become foster carers for the more complex cases such as remand cases. They would continue to receive their full salary along with time off to do remand work and additional salary. This pilot was in its early stages but may prove an incredibly cost effective invest to save method. Members thought that this should be an avenue that the Council explores along with considering staff who are at risk of redundancy as prospective foster carers, subject to the necessary checks and training being in place.
- 14.10 Members were very interested to hear about the 'bring a gift initiative'. The Head of Children and Families Social Care explained that at the Strategic Partnership, she had asked partners to donate a gift to looked after children, rather than monetary, a gift in kind. For example, accommodation for when

looked after children are home from university or cinema tickets. Members thought that this was an excellent initiative.

14.11 In conclusion, South Tyneside identified their long term task is to maintain a high quality of care, gain better outcomes and balance the budget. This change is likely to take 5 years to take full effect and prevention is key with the best interests of the child always the priority.

15. CONCLUSIONS

15.1 The Children's Services Scrutiny Forum concluded that:-

- (a) The Council has a lack of residential provision in Hartlepool and Members were impressed with the standard of residential care provided by Stockton Borough Council for looked after children and young people with lower level care needs;
- (b) As corporate parents, Members have a moral responsibility for their looked after children and young people, including the responsibility to address their needs. Therefore, by running an in-house children's home, this will provide a 'homely' environment, in Hartlepool, for the children and young people. It also presents a good business case, that may in part address the current impact and future budget pressures placed on services for looked after children and young people;
- (c) In-house foster placements are cost effective and that improving the take up of fostering within the boundaries of Hartlepool is essential;
- (d) Fostering is about integrating a child or young person into a family and it is a life style choice and vocation, not simply a 'job'. Therefore the child or young person should be included in all family events and activities;
- (e) It is necessary to reduce the numbers of looked after children and young people through strengthening provision of support to children on the edge of care by preventing family breakdown and delivering intensive packages of support. Members supported opportunities and initiatives to reduce the numbers of looked after children and young people;
- (f) All looked after children and young people should have the same opportunities, both academically and socially as other children and young people;
- (g) Stability of placement is essential and children and young people need to be suitable matched to placements based on their own individual needs;
- (h) Foster care and adoption arrangements work well but additional support should be offered where required.

- (i) In relation to the recruitment of foster carers and adopters, Members recognise that there is a national shortage and recruitment remains a difficult task;
- (j) Siblings should be kept together when taken into care and all options to make this possible need to be explored, for example, recruiting foster carers who have the capacity to take three or four children and / or young people;
- (k) All agencies need to work together to provide the best possible services for looked after children and young people; and
- (l) Looked after young people should have the option to remain in their placement beyond the age of 18 and if they wish to live independently, support should be available if needed

16. RECOMMENDATIONS

16.1 The Children's Services Scrutiny Forum has taken evidence from a wide variety of sources to assist in the formulation of a balanced range of recommendations. The Forum's key recommendations to the Cabinet are as outlined below:-

Residential Care

- (a) That the Council explores the viability of buying or building, and running, one or more 3 to 4 bedroom children's home(s) in Hartlepool, whether that be through the utilisation of existing buildings, buildings on the asset transfer list or new builds;
- (b) That the Council extends joint working and liaises with a range of housing providers in order to provide a breadth of accommodation for young people including supported accommodation, floating support, single person accommodation and accommodation whilst home from University;

Foster Care and Adoption

- (c) That the Council ensures that all looked after young people are equipped with the skills required for adulthood and independent living and extends care provision beyond the age of 18 for anyone not wishing to live independently at 18 and this may include supported accommodation, which should be available to a young person up until the young person feels ready to live independently;
- (d) That the Council, as part of the redeployment process, highlights to staff the option of becoming foster carers and explores the option of offering a 'career foster care' scheme to the staff at risk of redundancy, with the necessary skills;

- (e) That the Council aims to recruit more adopters and foster carers for children and young people with complex needs, giving thorough support and contact throughout the placement and post adoption;
- (f) That the Council keeps sibling groups together, where ever possible, and additional support is offered to foster carers to accommodate sibling groups;
- (g) That the Council improves links and communication with foster carers by:-
 - (i) providing additional support where required;
 - (ii) keeping foster carers up to date with developments;
 - (iii) publicising the 24 hour support service; and
 - (iv) using improved communication methods
- (h) That the Council considers, during the recruitment process, whether foster carers are better suited to long or short term placements, taking into account whether foster carers are willing to take their fostered child or young person with them on their family holiday;
- (i) That the Council ensures that a clear set of criteria is in place so that placements are appropriate to meet the needs of the child or young person including involving the child or young person in the planning processes for all placements;

Partnerships

- (j) That the Council and partner agencies outline in their service plans what they can and will do for looked after children and young people and continues to develop a multi agency approach;
- (k) That the Council develops and implements a scheme similar to the 'bring a gift' initiative, whereby partner organisations across all Council activities are asked to donate a gift in kind (for example, cinema tickets) for a looked after child or young person;
- (l) That the Council explores the development of innovative ways of providing early intervention services to hard to reach children and young people to avoid children and young people becoming looked after; and
- (m) That the Council ensures that any meetings in relation to the personal circumstances of a looked after child or young person are held out of school hours to maintain confidentiality and ensures that all schools provide a designated person to act as a mentor to the looked after child and young person.

17. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 17.1 The Forum is grateful to all those who have presented evidence during the course of the scrutiny review. We would like to place on record our appreciation for all those witnesses who attended the Forum. In particular the Forum would like to thank the following for their co-operation during the scrutiny review:-

Hartlepool Borough Council:

Portfolio Holder for Children's Services – Cllr Simmons
Sally Robinson – Assistant Director - Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services
Jane Young – Head of Business Unit, Specialist Services
Ian Merritt – Head of Commissioning and Children's Trust
James Sinclair – Connexions Team Manager
Zoe Westley – School Improvement Adviser
Emma Rutherford – Social Inclusion Co-ordinator
Carmel Jackson – Independent Reviewing Officer
Annette Hall – Participation Officer
Wendy Rudd – Head of Business Unit
John Ellison – Social Worker
Cath Bishop – Social Worker
Margaret Hennessey – Team Manager
Jacky Yeoman-Vass – Family Placement Team Manager
Maureen McEnaney – Head of Safeguarding and Review Unit
Sylvia Lowe – Manager of Exmore Grove
Simon Field – Principal Practitioner
Terry Moore – Principal Practitioner
Angela Laughton – Social Worker
Denise Sutton – Social Worker
Dawn Thorpe – Social Worker
Gladis Mante-Nyadu – Social Worker

Co-opted young people on the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum:

Ashleigh Bostock
Robyn Reid
Danielle O'Keefe
Hannah Bew
Millie Allan
Kimberley Henry
Demi Coull

External Representatives

Amanda Bradley – South Tyneside Council
Angie Askins - Stockton Borough Council
Andy Powell – Housing Hartlepool
Lynn Beeston – Chief Inspector, Cleveland Police

Brian Durham – Young Foundations
Trish Wetherell – Hartlepool College of Further Education
Khalid Azaam – Assistant Director of Commissioning and Systems
Development
Dr McKinity – General Practitioner
Gillian Sild – Brougham Primary School
Foster Carers

Looked after children and young people:

Leigh (19)
Becky (21)
Simon (20)
Claire (17)
Mark (16)
Jordan (16)
George (13)
Paul (16)
Jack (15)
Caitlin (13)
Shelby (14)
Billie Jo (12)
Sarah (11)
James (9)
Marcus (14)
Scott (20)
Jamie (8)
Jordan (15)
Nicola (16)
Michael (17)
Arron (18)

**COUNCILLOR CHRISTOPHER AKERS – BELCHER
CHAIR OF THE CHILDREN’S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM**

March 2012

Contact Officer:- Laura Stones – Scrutiny Support Officer
Chief Executive’s Department - Corporate Strategy
Hartlepool Borough Council
Tel: 01429 523 087
Email: laura.stones@hartlepool.gov.uk

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in preparation of this report:-

- (a) Report of the Scrutiny Support Officer entitled ‘Scrutiny Investigation into The Provision of Support and Services to Looked After Children / Young

- People – Scoping Report’ presented to the Children’s Services Scrutiny Forum of 18 October 2011.
- (b) Report of the Scrutiny Support Officer entitled ‘Investigation into the Provision of Support and Services to Looked After Children - Setting the Scene - Covering Report’ presented to the Children’s Services Scrutiny Forum of 18 October 2011.
 - (c) Presentation of Officers from the Child and Adult Services Department entitled ‘Services for Children and Looked After Young People’ delivered to the Children’s Services Scrutiny Forum Services Scrutiny Forum of 18 October 2011.
 - (d) Report of the Head of Business Unit entitled ‘Hartlepool Borough Council’s Provision Support and Services for Looked After Children and Young People – Setting the Scene Report’ presented to the Children’s Services Scrutiny Forum of 18 October 2011.
 - (e) Report of the Scrutiny Support Officer entitled ‘Budget Consultation – Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services – Covering Report’ presented to the Children’s Services Scrutiny Forum of 1 November 2011.
 - (f) Presentation of the Assistant Director of Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services ‘Savings 2012/13 – Safeguarding and Specialist Services’ presented to the Children’s Services Scrutiny Forum of 1 November 2011.
 - (g) Report of the Scrutiny Support Officer entitled ‘Investigation into the Provision of Support and Services to Looked After Children / Young People – Group Exercises - Covering Report’ presented to the Children’s Services Scrutiny Forum of 23 November 2011.
 - (h) Report of the Scrutiny Support Officer entitled ‘Provision of Support and Services to Looked After Children / Young People: Evidence From South Tyneside Council - Covering Report’ presented to the Children’s Services Scrutiny Forum of 17 January 2012.
 - (i) Presentation of the Head of Children and Families Social Care at South Tyneside Council entitled ‘Looked After Children and Child Protection in South Tyneside’ delivered to the Children’s Services Scrutiny Forum Services Scrutiny Forum of 17 January 2012.
 - (j) Report of the Scrutiny Support Officer entitled ‘Provision of Support and Services to Looked After Children / Young People - Feedback From the Group Exercises Undertaken by the Children’s Services Scrutiny Forum on 23 November 2011 and Feedback From the Site Visit – Covering Report’ presented to the Children’s Services Scrutiny Forum of 17 January 2012.
 - (k) ‘Feedback from Group Exercises held on 23 November 2011’ presented to the Children’s Services Scrutiny Forum of 17 January 2012.

- (l) Report of the Scrutiny Support Officer entitled 'Investigation Into the Provision of Support and Services to Looked After Children / Young People – Views of Looked After Children / Young People - Covering Report presented to the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum of 31 January 2012.
- (m) Presentation from looked after children and young people entitled 'Children and Young People's Views' presented to the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum of 31 January 2012.
- (n) Minutes of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum of 18 October 2011, 1 November 2011, 23 November 2011, 17 January 2011 and 31 January 2011.
- (o) Poverty website - <http://www.poverty.org.uk/29/index.shtml#def>
- (p) Hartlepool's Children Looked After Strategy – www.hartlepool.gov.uk
- (q) Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services – 16 July 2010 - <http://www.ofsted.eu/local-authorities/hartlepool>
- (r) Messages for Munro – A report of Children's Views collected for Professor Eileen Munro by the Children's Rights Director for England
- (s) Centre for Public Scrutiny – 10 Questions to ask if you're Scrutinising Services for Looked after Children