

Feedback from Group Exercises held on 23 November 2011

QUESTION	COMMENTS	SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT
<p><b>1. How good is the health and wellbeing of children in care? Could this be improved, if yes, how?</b></p>	<p>90% of health assessments completed in the timescales</p> <p>Dental health ok at present</p> <p>Some issue in being seen / waiting lists to get registered for doctor therefore have access to doctor through One Life Centre (fairly recently moved back into Hartlepool)</p> <p>Emotional health and wellbeing - young people in care for extended periods of time and multiple placements. Transition into adult life has a huge impact. CAMHS can be effective</p> <p>Children looked after aware of the services</p>	<p>Continue multi agency response working</p>
<p><b>2. How good is the standard of any residential care provided or used by the Council? Could this be improved, if yes, how?</b></p>	<p>Difficulties in sustaining tenancies</p> <p>When is someone ready to live independently? Don't set young person up to fail</p>	<p>Preparation for independent living</p> <p>Support to help stay with family</p> <p>The need to extend joint working and</p>

	<p>Impact of changes to Benefits in the future</p> <p>Young person feels there is an increased likelihood of eviction and rules are too rigid</p> <p>Low levels of supported accommodation within the Borough and lack of residential provision</p>	<p>liaise with a range of housing providers</p> <p>Care provision be extended beyond the age of 16 for anyone not wishing to live independently at 16</p>
<p><b>3. How well does the Council do in commissioning or providing services for looked after children / young people?</b></p>	<p>Would you send a child of your own out of town for a home?</p> <p>Smaller residential -If you have units you would fill them</p> <p>Dunston Road – Independent Provider currently in Hartlepool</p> <p>Over coming barriers / prejudicial against young person</p> <p>Young people placed out of the area run back home</p> <p>Sometimes young person needs to be out of town</p> <p>Issues for young people into adulthood, relationships</p>	<p>The need to ensure that placements are appropriate to meet the needs of the child</p> <p>Need to look at why Children Homes were closed, what were the problems?</p>

	<p>Importance of questioning whether it is 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</p>	
<p><b>4. How stable and secure are the lives of looked after children / young people while they are in care? Could this be improved? If yes, how?</b></p>	<p>Security and stability of looked after children – it is important to find suitable matching placements</p> <p>Potential impacts of emergency foster placements</p>	<p>Foster carer should try and plan moves</p> <p>Young person over 18 years, should continue to support young person</p> <p>Reduce respite placement from carers</p> <p>Take children / young person on holiday with you</p> <p>Option to examine performance figures of the Council in relation to stability of placements for looked after children and young people.</p> <p>Additional support for foster carers</p>
<p><b>5. What more could be done to fulfil the Council’s responsibilities as a ‘Corporate Parent’?</b></p>	<p>What would you want for your own children?</p> <p>Should feel part of the family</p>	<p>Ensure young people have the same opportunities / involved in planning process</p> <p>Families should stay together</p> <p>The need to question whether the level of</p>

		<p>support for a looked after child would be acceptable for own child</p> <p>Placing of siblings together</p>
<p><b>6. How well does the Council do at finding appropriate adoptive families for children for whom it is decided this is the right option?</b></p>	<p>Numbers of children for whom plan for adoption is rising, number of adopters reducing</p> <p>Report of success of adoption in Hartlepool for statistics in relation to placements within timescale of decisions Identified shortage and successfully advertised – more adopters however, this does not necessarily match the needs of children waiting. One of the measures was finding the right match and reference was made to Hartlepool’s success in the adoption process.</p> <p>Trying to be flexible – education, willing to work with and support children</p> <p>Therapeutic support – Acorn</p> <p>How long does process take – balancing act – setting quality info and preparing people in timely way</p> <p>Adoption register process – getting right profiles for children</p>	<p>Measure success by how many placements are the right match evidenced by rates of disruptions compared with other local authorities</p> <p>Need to recruit and prepare adopters for children with more complex needs – support is crucial to this</p> <p>Contact after adoption to support placements</p> <p>Better links with adoption team</p> <p>One of the main issues identified was the need to support carers to accommodate sibling groups with complex needs.</p>

	<p>Prospective adopters attend panel meeting</p> <p>Quality of written information to Panel</p> <p>Disruption meetings</p>	
<p><b>7. How well do foster care arrangements work? Could this be improved? If yes, how?</b></p>	<p>Placement breakdown – frequently linked to minimising problems. Once crisis over it has not gone away, need to look at what support is required</p> <p>Foster carers don't always speak out, they look to each other for support. Make judgement when to talk to link worker</p> <p>24 hour telephone support service available – managers from Hartlepool</p> <p>High numbers of foster carers in town Legal proceedings – children not well served by judicial system. Detrimental impact placed on looked after children by legal proceedings</p> <p>Carers need to be jack of all trades</p> <p>Good relationships between foster carer and social workers</p> <p>Situations where carers are left in the dark about future plans of the children they are</p>	<p>Link worker – if not available would like 2<sup>nd</sup> that has pre-existing relationship with foster carers need to be confident to speak out</p> <p>Foster carer email site. Put number on site</p> <p>Foster carers need to be kept up to date with developments Need to publicise the 24 hour support service and improve communication methods with foster carers</p>

	<p>looking after until the last minute. This leaves the carers having to explain to the children that they can't answer their questions – leaves both carers and children distressed.</p> <p>Foster carers don't have luxury</p>	
<p><b>8. What support does the Council provide to children / young people leaving care and how effective is it?</b></p>	<p>Leaving Care service available but often young people vote with their feet.</p> <p>Always room for improvement</p> <p>Getting message across of the reality of leaving home. Children should leave home when ready – children receiving reassurance</p> <p>Shouldn't be leaving care – should be supporting independence</p>	<p>Need innovative ways of providing services to hard to reach young people</p> <p>Provide breath of accommodation for young people, supported lodgings, supported accommodation, floating support, single person accommodation Accommodation whilst home from University</p> <p>Co-ordinate services and ensure the appropriate skills are available to move onto adulthood.</p>
<p><b>9. How well do looked after children / young people do at school, both academically and in terms of other kind of achievements? Could this be improved? If yes, how?</b></p>	<p>Results:-</p> <p><u>KS2 (7 children)</u> 43% level 4 Increase from 30%</p> <p><u>KS4 (16 children)</u> 6% A* - C including English and Maths</p>	<p>Mentors – good idea, one trusted person - Each school should have designated person</p> <p>A looked after young person felt that as a looked after child she was singled out at school and suggested that any meetings in relation to personal circumstances</p>

	<p>4 looked after young people were currently studying at university.</p> <p>(Statistics are based on a transient population)</p> <p>Individual progress is now measured with Personal Education Plans – informal progress (e.g sports etc) monitored</p> <p>Attendance monitored weekly and followed up immediately – greatly improved</p> <p>Post 16 education – Hartlepool College of Further Education were 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.</p> <p>Effective support mechanisms were in place for children looked after when problems arose.</p> <p>Social Workers role is key in supporting improvements in education attainment and the potential benefits as a result.</p>	<p>should be held out of school hours to maintain confidentiality and schools should provide an individual they can talk to eg Citizenship Member.</p> <p>The need for settled placements and to improve links with foster carers to ensure young people were placed at the right schools was highlighted.</p>
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<p><b>10. How effective is the professional workforce of social workers and others responsible for running services for and working with looked after children / young people?</b></p>	<p>Networking is good, helps effective working</p> <p>Getting better at ensuring stability of school</p>	

Comments / views from a Hartlepool Foster Carer fostering children from Stockton:-

Stockton Council offer all of their leisure facilities free to foster children and their carers, even if the foster carers reside in Hartlepool and are fostering children from Stockton. Does Hartlepool offer this?

**ANSWER: All foster families receive a free Active card which gives reduced rate admission to leisure and swimming facilities of the council. In addition the sports development team deliver day and residential activities for children looked after on a weekend and during school holidays.**

**In collaboration with Pony World, children looked after can receive reduced introduction rates to experienced horse riding.**



This would help promote health (swimming baths for younger kids or gym membership for older kids). It could promote education (Maritime Experience etc.) Could Hartlepool partner with Stockton and share facilities? (Splash is better than Mill House but Maritime Experience is better than Preston Park Museum). Could each party waver costs to carers and families?

**ANSWER: Along with 9 other local authorities in the North East region, Hartlepool participates in the MAX card scheme which offers children in care and their carers free or reduced admission to regional attractions including museums, castles and in 2010 theatre tickets (this includes Maritime Museum). The aim of the MAX card scheme is to increase access to culture for children and young people and is managed by the North East Museums Hub. The Hub is also promoting TECH Max Generation 2012 for its member local authorities which aims to promote a cultural Olympiad. TECH Max will provide funding for 12 projects across the North East region led by children looked after.**

**Certainly scope for Hartlepool and Stockton to collaborate to mutual benefit with reciprocal access to one another's provision and this can be further explored.**

We have also spoken to a few foster carers when on trips out and they asked if they could have discount as they were carers for foster children and were told if they come next time with i.d. then this would be looked at. I know we recently went to lightwater valley with my kids, the foster babies and others. It cost us nothing for the babies but its an expensive day out if you have older foster children. Our agency is going to supply us with id cards.

**ANSWER: Hartlepool foster carers are issued ID cards identifying them as foster carers for the Council.**

During the summer holidays our agency Reach Out Care arranged a day out each week to the beach, Wynyard Park, Splash etc social workers and support workers attended and everybody met other carers and all the kids played together. Does Hartlepool do this?

**ANSWER: Reach Out Care is an independent fostering agency that provides a range of services, from the local authority position we deliver weekend and holiday activities for children, provide funding to the foster care association to support the delivery of activities for foster carers and their children/fostered children. During the summer holiday the local authority take some children on residential break and a fostering allowance is paid to carers for holidays.**

Stockton also had an awards day at Preston Park for looked after kids and they received certificates for outstanding progress etc. again not sure if Hartlepool does this?

**ANSWER: HBC has the annual 'Celebrating Success' night where children receive awards as well as the summer barbeque and annual Christmas party.**

I realise Hartlepool may already do the things I mentioned above but now I work with foster kids I have become quite passionate about their cause.

Comments / views from a co-opted Member of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum:-

What I would like to comment on is that it is all very well attracting new Foster Carers, but what work is being done to match children/young people to the right foster families?

**ANSWER: Part of the fostering assessment process is to identify the skills and quality of the carers taking into account their own family situation and throughout the training and assessment, social workers are able to build positive relationships with fostering families and provide a good assessment of their capacity to meet individual needs of children. This information alongside the assessments of children form the initial basis of a match. For children placed permanently in foster care the current carers of the children are involved in seeking the appropriate match as well as the social work applying matching considerations to match children to carers. An assessment report is completed and presented to fostering panel and the agency decision maker before a placement is made. Child Appreciation Days are held to assist and prepare prospective carers for the placement.**

What real support is there for foster carers when things don't go so well and the carers are not trained to deal with the emotions/tantrums and even violence of a child/YP?

**ANSWER: Hartlepool foster carers have access to a 24 hour telephone support service where they can call for advice, guidance and assistance. The Emergency Duty Team provide out of hours support on an evening and weekends. Every child has an allocated social worker and every foster carer has an allocated supervising social worker. Foster carers are provided a full programme of training and development which aims to prepare them for the challenges they may face in the role of foster carer. Furthermore, where appropriate foster carers through the social worker have access to the child and adolescent mental health service where therapists will work directly to support carers as well as children and the**

***Placement Support team provide support and respite within the home. There is a monthly Fostering Support Group where foster carers can seek peer support and also request session are held focussing on specific issues if required.***

Fairly recent news items indicate that far too many families are taking children and YP into their homes WITHOUT the appropriate training, vetting and support needed. Is this being addressed in Hartlepool?

***ANSWER: Yes, all carers receive a comprehensive programme of training, preparation and assessment in line with the national regulations and minimum standards prior to being approved and once approved are inducted into the fostering role.***

I personally feel that childless couples who seek to become foster carers can have no idea what they may be letting themselves in for. I have two children and despite being 10 years older than my sibling, changing his nappy and babysitting him, I still found it extremely difficult to cope with all of the changes to our lives, marriage, et al. I am in the fortunate position of knowing the background of my children and being responsible from the onset for their upbringing. Foster carers don't have that luxury. I'm not sure how much of a bond they are able to make, especially if they have to hand the children/YP back to their families. I imagine it to be really tough, but very rewarding when things work out well.

Foster care is important and I fully support the notion of offering children and YP the opportunity to be looked after in a caring home environment, rather than a care home. But, I wonder if YP develop a false sense of what life is like with other families when carers have to abide by so many (necessary) rules/guidelines.

How can carers cope with this? These are some of the issues, how can carers be supported?