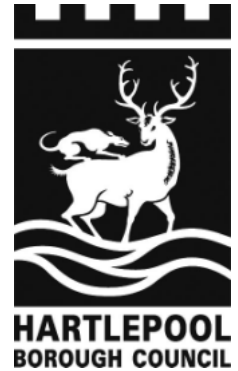


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CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM AGENDA



Tuesday 18 October 2011

at 3.30pm

in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Hartlepool

MEMBERS: CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM:

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

Co-opted Members: Eira Ballingall, David Relton and 1 vacancy

Resident Representatives: Joan Steel, and 2 vacancies.

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

School Council Representatives: Two vacancies

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS

3. MINUTES

3.1 To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2011

4. RESPONSES FROM THE COUNCIL, THE EXECUTIVE OR COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL TO FINAL REPORTS OF THIS FORUM

No items

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5. CONSIDERATION OF REQUEST FOR SCRUTINY REVIEWS REFERRED VIA SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

No items

6. CONSIDERATION OF PROGRESS REPORTS / BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK DOCUMENTS

No items

7. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

YOUTH SERVICE HEADLAND FUTURE BUDGET CONSULTATION

7.1 Youth Service Headland Future Budget Consultation:-

- (a) Covering Report – *Scrutiny Support Officer*
- (b) Written evidence from the young people's representatives

PREVENTION, SAFEGUARDING AND SPECIALIST SERVICES BUDGET CONSULTATION

7.2 Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services Budget Consultation - Scoping Report – *Scrutiny Support Officer*

INVESTIGATION INTO THE PROVISION OF SUPPORT AND SERVICES TO LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN / YOUNG PEOPLE

7.3 Provision of Support and Services to Looked After Children – Scoping Report – *Scrutiny Support Officer*

7.4 Setting the Scene:-

- (a) Covering report – *Scrutiny Support Officer*
- (b) Provision of Support and Services for Looked After Children and Young People – Setting the Scene Report – *Head of Business Unit (Specialist Services)*
- (c) Verbal evidence from the Member of Parliament for Hartlepool (*subject to availability*)
- (d) Verbal evidence from the Children's Services Portfolio Holder (*subject to availability*)

8. ISSUES IDENTIFIED FROM FORWARD PLAN

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9. ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS ARE URGENT

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

- i) Date of Next Meeting Wednesday 23 November 2011 commencing at 3.30 pm in the Council Chamber**

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

MINUTES

6 September 2011

The meeting commenced at 4.30 p.m. in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor: Angie Wilcox (In the Chair)

Councillors: Mary Fleet, Sheila Griffin and Paul Thompson

Co-opted Member: Eira Ballingall

Young Peoples Representatives: Hannah Bew, Bianca Gascoigne, Kim Henry and Robyn Reid

Also Present: In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2 Councillor Brenda Loynes as substitute for Councillor Ray Wells

Officers: Caroline O'Neill, Assistant Director, Performance and Achievement.
Sally Robinson, Assistant Director, Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services
Danielle Swainston, Sure Start Extended Services and Early Years Manager
Ian Merritt, Strategic Commissioner
Paul Robson, Integrated Transport Manager
Mark Smith, Head of Integrated Youth Support Services
Helen White, Senior Youth Worker
Laura Stones, Scrutiny Support Officer
Denise Wimpenny, Principal Democratic Services Officer

16. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Wells, Co-opted Member David Relton and Resident Representative, Joan Steel

17. Declarations of interest by Members

Councillor Paul Thompson declared a personal interest in Minute Numbers 25 and 26.

18. Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 July 2011

Confirmed.

19. Responses from the Council, The Executive or Committees of the Council to Final Reports of this Forum

(Director of Child and Adult Services and the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services)

None.

20. Consideration of request for scrutiny reviews referred via Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee

None.

21. Consideration of progress reports/budget and policy framework documents

None.

22. Any Other Items which the Chair Considers are Urgent

The Chair ruled that the following item of business should be considered by the Committee as a matter of urgency in accordance with the provisions of Section 100(B) (4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 in order that the matter could be dealt with without delay.

23. Any Other Business – Scrutiny Investigation into Young People's Access to Transport – Scoping Report *(Young People's Representatives)*

The Young People's Representatives presented a scoping report for their investigation into the issue of Young People's Access to Transport.

The aim of Investigation

To explore ways of making transport more accessible for young people.

Proposed Terms of Reference

- (a) To gain an understanding of what transport is available across the town that young people can access at night.
- (b) To examine the transport times, areas, costs covering all

positive and negative aspects. The young people will examine examples of good practice and how we could build on these

Potential Areas of Enquiry/Sources of Evidence

- (a) Young people from Town Wide Projects including BME, Deaf Youth Project, Hart Gables, LDD Young People.
- (b) Local Authority Officers responsible for transport
- (c) Mayor
- (d) Portfolio Holder for Children's Services
- (e) School Representatives (school council)

Key suggestions of documentary/internet sources were included in the report together with details of the proposed timetable.

It was noted that West View Project had mini buses available and it was suggested that the potential to utilise transport utilised by community groups, be explored as part of the investigation.

It was suggested that it may be beneficial for the young people to explore whether the accessibility of transport affected young people from specific areas or whether it was a town wide issue.

The Integrated Transport Manager provided details of the Travel Club Scheme. In relation to sources of evidence, the Committee was advised of the benefits of the Transport Champion Forum to which the young people representatives were welcome to attend.

Recommended

The proposed remit for the investigation, terms of reference and potential areas of enquiry/sources of evidence be agreed.

24. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Budget Consultation – Covering Report/Presentation

Scrutiny Support Officer/Assistant Director of Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services

The Scrutiny Support Officer referred to the meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee on Friday 24 June 2011, when it was agreed that the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum would consider (CAMHS) budget item. As part of the consultation process, the Assistant Director of Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services had been invited to the meeting to provide a presentation in relation to this budget area.

The Assistant Director, who was in attendance at the meeting, provided a detailed and comprehensive presentation which focussed on the following:-

Proposed Savings for 2012/13 in relation to the following projects:-

- Children's Social Care Commissioning Year 3 SDO - £348,000
- Review of Child Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) funding and services - £15,000
- Phase 2 Review of Youth Offending Service - £15,000

In relation to the review of CAMHS provision, Members were advised that funding was likely to reduce year on year over the span of the current spending review. The budget for 2011/12 was £207,786 with current commitments of £141,130. The uncommitted balance of £66,656 had historically been used to support volatile residential and foster care placements budget. The target saving from budget was £15,000. Details of the budget breakdown was provided.

The presentation set out the review proposals together with proposed outcomes which included improved management information to measure impact and outcomes, ensuring specialist services across the trust could be accessed, review of social worker post to ensure maximum effectiveness for children looked after and preventing children requiring the service, closer joint working arrangements, enhanced training role with staff and carers, enhanced role of primary mental health worker in wraparound looked after support team, clearly designated sessions per week of specialist provision, longer term inter-authority review of the Tees wide CAMH service and potential for joint commissioning to increase efficiency and effectiveness.

In terms of the impact of the review, in addition to the overall budget reduction of £15k, the new service specification would reduce the need to spot purchase therapeutic support, there would be no direct impact on level of service, no staffing implications, no associated cost in delivering savings and the service was confident these savings could be achieved through the redesign of services in partnership with the Trust which would improve CAMHS provision for children looked after.

A query was raised as to whether children living in Hartlepool, placed by another local authority and requiring CAMHS service was provided by Hartlepool. Members were advised that whilst practices varied throughout the country access to mainstream CAMHS services would normally be provided. In response to a request for clarification, the Assistant Director outlined the process in relation to access to CAMHS, the option to spot purchase services and the background to a decision to withdraw funding to support Hartlepool Mind in dealing with children with emotional issues. It was highlighted that the service for looked after children was a separate issue to the CAMHS service.

Members went on to discuss the importance of prevention and early intervention to reduce the number of looked after children and demand on such services. Members were strongly of the opinion that preventative measures / solutions were essential and that support should be given to these

services wherever possible.

Whilst Members expressed their strong support for the retention of services for looked after children, it was accepted that the savings proposed should be accepted.

Recommended

- (i) That the proposed £15,000 saving in relation to CAMHS provision, be supported.
- (ii) That the comments of the Forum be noted and submitted to a future Cabinet meeting.

25. Play Opportunities Pool Budget Consultation – Scoping Report *(Scrutiny Support Officer)*

At the meeting of Scrutiny Coordinating Committee on 24 June 2011 Members determined their work programme for the 2011/12 Municipal Year. It was decided that each Scrutiny Forum would focus its attention on preparations for the 2012/13 budget during the current Municipal Year, given the extremely challenging financial situation facing the authority.

It was agreed at the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee work programming meeting on 24 June 2011 that a series budget proposals would be considered by the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum, details of which were set out in the report. In accordance with the timetable agreed, the Forum was asked to provide views and / or alternative suggestions for savings, regarding the 2012/13 budget proposals presented to the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum in relation to the Play Opportunities Pool.

The report set out the proposed terms of reference for consideration of this budget item, areas of enquiry together with proposed timetable. It was intended that a report on the Play Opportunities budget proposals would be considered by the Portfolio Holder in November 2011.

Recommended

That the proposed remit for consideration of the 2012/13 budget proposals, as outlined in the report in relation to the play opportunities pool, be agreed.

26. Play Opportunities Pool Budget Consultation – Covering Report/Presentation *(Scrutiny Support Officer/Assistant Director of Performance and Achievement)*

Members were referred to the meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee on Friday 24 June 2011, when it was agreed that the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum would consider the Play Opportunities Pool budget item. As part of the consultation process, the Assistant Director of Performance and Achievement and Sure Start Extended Services and Early Years Manager had

been invited to the meeting to provide a presentation in relation to this budget area.

The Sure Start Extended Services and Early Years Manager provided a presentation which focussed on the following:-

- Purpose of Play Opportunities Pool
- Total Budget for 2011/12 - £18,000
- Current year £16,603.57 had been allocated to 8 groups
- Examples of Grants awarded – Families First, Hartlepool PATCH, Hartlepool Special Needs Support Group, Hartlepool Young Carers Positive Future Project, Child Deaf Youth Project, Funky World, Catcote School, West View Project

With regard to the proposal to withdraw funding in this area, Members raised serious concerns regarding the potential impact on families as a result. A Member highlighted the withdrawal of such funding to these groups would result in a loss of access to funding from other sources. The Assistant Director highlighted the department's reluctance to lose these services and emphasised the current budget pressures facing the Council, hence the reason for the proposal. In response to concerns regarding the potential impact on those families in most need of the service, Members were advised that an early intervention grant would be utilised to target those families in such need.

Members highlighted that this was one of the only universal services left available to all families and therefore were strongly of the opinion that this service provision should not be removed. Members did not agree that only targeted support should be supported / provided.

In relation to the grant awarded to Funky World, a Member questioned whether the £1,635.00 had been awarded for learning through play sessions as it had been reported in the Hartlepool Mail that this Group had recently ceased to operate. The Head of Service confirmed that the Council were currently in discussions with this group and whilst this may not be open to the public it had not ceased to trade. In the event that the group dissolved, the funding would be utilised as a saving and carried forward to the following year's budget.

Following a lengthy debate and, whilst acknowledging the current budget pressures, the reasons for the proposal and that there was no statutory requirement for provision, the Forum were of the view that this service should be retained.

Recommended

- (i) That this service be retained.
- (ii) The comments of the Forum be noted and submitted to a future Portfolio Holder meeting.

27. Youth Service Headland Futures Budget Consultation – Scoping Report *(Scrutiny Support Officer)*

At the meeting of Scrutiny Coordinating Committee on 24 June 2011 Members determined their work programme for the 2011/12 Municipal Year. It was decided that each Scrutiny Forum would focus its attention on preparations for the 2012/13 budget during the current Municipal Year, given the extremely challenging financial situation facing the authority.

It was agreed at the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee work programming meeting on 24 June 2011 that a series budget proposals would be considered by the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum, details of which were set out in the report. In accordance with the timetable agreed, the Forum was asked to provide views and / or alternative suggestions for savings, regarding the 2012/13 budget proposals presented to the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum in relation to the Youth Service Headland Futures.

The report set out the proposed terms of reference for consideration of this budget item, areas of enquiry together with proposed timetable. It was intended that a report on the Youth Service Headland Futures budget proposals would be considered by the Portfolio Holder in November 2011.

Recommended

That the proposed remit for consideration of the 2012/13 budget proposals as outlined in the report in relation to the Youth Service Headland Futures, be agreed.

28. Youth Service Headland Futures Budget Consultation – Covering Report/Presentation *(Scrutiny Support Officer/Assistant Director of Performance and Achievement)*

The Scrutiny Support Officer referred to the meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee on Friday 24 June 2011, when it was agreed that the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum would consider the Youth Service Headland Futures budget item. As part of the consultation process, the Assistant Director of Performance and Achievement had been invited to the meeting to provide a presentation in relation to this budget area and answer any questions in relation to this area.

The Head of Integrated Youth Support Services provided the following budget information:-

- Integrated Youth Support Service current budget allocation - £30k for the commissioning of Youth Support activities to fill identified gaps in local youth provision
- £27,380.00 of this budget currently paid to Headland Futures to support delivery of youth provision on the headland

- Contract extended in March 2011 for a further year and ends on 31 March 2012

Members were advised that as part of the broader savings required it was proposed that £30k be offered as a saving from the Commissioning Budget for 2012 onwards. It was envisaged that the broader commissioning of Youth Support activities would be taken forward through use of the Early Intervention Grant and the developing Early Intervention Strategy.

Concerns were expressed regarding this proposal and indicated that this funding was utilised for targeted work and was a national example. The impact of withdrawal of funding was debated which included issues of isolation for people currently living on the headland resulting in limited access to alternative facilities. Members were advised that the funding was allocated due to the geographical location of young people on the headland and this issue would require further consideration.

In response to a request for clarification regarding confirmation of commissioning for the early intervention grant, it was reported that following approval from Cabinet, notices for tenders would be issued. A Member requested that information in this regard be publicised as widely as possible to local groups.

Recommended

- (i) Members did not support the £30k proposed saving and recommended that this service be retained on the basis of the geographical area of the headland resulting in limited access to alternative activities.
- (ii) That the comments of the Forum be noted and submitted to a future Portfolio meeting.

29. Six Monthly Monitoring of agreed Children's Services Scrutiny Forum's Recommendations *(Scrutiny Support Officer)*

The Scrutiny Support Officer provided details of progress made on the delivery of the agreed scrutiny recommendations against investigations undertaken by the Forum since the 2005/06 municipal year. The report included a chart which provided the overall progress made by all scrutiny forums since 2005 and Appendix A provided a detailed explanation of progress made against each recommendation agreed by this Forum.

It was noted that since the 2005/06 municipal year, 78% of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum's recommendations had been completed with 15% assigned and 8% cancelled.

- i) That progress against the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum agreed recommendations since the 2005/06 municipal year, be noted.
- ii) Members were requested to retain Appendix A contained within the

plastic wallet distributed for future reference

30. Home to School Transport Budget Consultation Additional Information – Covering Report (*Scrutiny Support Officer*)

The Scrutiny Support Officer referred to the meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee on Friday 24 June 2011, when it was agreed that the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum would consider the Home to School Transport budget item. Following consideration of this issue at the meeting of this Forum on 19 July 2011, the Forum requested additional information in relation to the following, details of which were attached as an appendix to the report:-

- (a) Breakdown of statutory and non-statutory services
- (b) Figures/percentage spent on special needs transport

The Assistant Director of Performance and Achievement and Integrated Transport Manager were in attendance to respond to any queries raised by Members.

The Integrated Transport Manager provided details of the proposed consultation process which would be undertaken with various consultees including Transport Forums and Head Teachers. It was proposed that an efficiency of £29,000 from the post 16 non statutory transport services would be achieved following consultation. Non statutory transport provision would also be reviewed with a view to achieving additional savings through the denominational transport services. Members raised concerns over the reduction of denominational transport service and requested that alternative proposals be explored for the children / young people accessing this service.

Members went on to discuss statutory and non-statutory provision and a number of queries were raised in relation to provision for children with special needs and those living in isolated areas without access to bus routes to which the Integrated Transport Manager provided clarification regarding the options available for vulnerable groups.

It was noted that the cost of transport had reduced significantly in recent years as a result of various changes to provision.

Recommended

- (i) Members supported the initial consultation proposals.
- (ii) That the comments of the Forum on the Home to School Transport budget consultation from today's meeting and the meeting of 19 July 2011 be noted and submitted to a future Cabinet meeting as part of the consultation process.

31. The Executive's Forward Plan *(Scrutiny Support Officer)*

The Scrutiny Support Officer referred Members to the key decisions contained within the Executive's Forward Plan (September to December 2011) relating to the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum, as set out in the report. A summary of all key decisions were attached at Appendix A.

It was reported that a number of key issues had been considered by Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee.

Recommended

That the contents of the report, be noted.

32. Date and Time of Next Meeting

It was reported that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 18 October 2011 commencing at 4.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre.

The meeting concluded at 5.55 pm.

CHAIR

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

18 October 2011



Report of: Scrutiny Support Officer

Subject: YOUTH SERVICE HEADLAND FUTURE – BUDGET
CONSULTATION - COVERING REPORT

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members that the young people who use the services provided by Headland Future asked to meet with the young people's representatives on the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum to discuss the proposal to offer up the 30k Commissioning Budget, which is currently paid to Headland Future to support the delivery of Youth Provision on the Headland, from 2012 onwards.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.2 Members will recall that at the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum held on 6 September 2011 a proposal was put forward to offer up the 30k Commissioning budget, which is currently paid to Headland Future to support the delivery of Youth Provision on the Headland, for 2012 onwards.
- 2.3 The young people's representatives met with the young people from Headland Future on 29 September 2011 to receive their comments. The issues and concerns raised at this meeting are attached as **Appendix A** to this report.
- 2.4 The young people from Headland Future have submitted written evidence which is attached as item 7.1(b) of today's agenda.

3. RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 That Members of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum consider the information provided and seek clarification on any relevant issues where required.

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 'Children's Services Scrutiny Forum consideration of 2012/13 Budget Items – Youth Service Headland Future – Scoping Report – 6 September 2011
- (b) Report of Scrutiny Support Officer entitled Youth Service Headland Future – Covering Report – 6 September 2011
- (c) Minutes of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum of 6 September 2011

Notes from the meeting with the Young People from Headland Future

Some of the young people from Headland Future met with the young people's representatives on the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum to discuss the proposal to offer up the 30k Commissioning budget, which is currently paid to Headland Future to support the delivery of Youth Provision on the Headland, for 2012 onwards.

The Headland Future young people, who were present, had been members of the group for the past 4 / 5 / 6 years and did not want the service to close. They said that if the service was to close there would be more anti social behaviour, as Headland Future is the only place on the Headland for young people to go. The young people said that buses to / from the Headland had been reduced / stopped.

The young people come to Headland Future to socialise, play pool, talk to their friends and talk to staff with any problems. The young people look forward to going. The centre is open Monday to Thursday each week and around 25 to 30 young people a night use the service, with around 150 in all accessing the service.

There is also a young father's programme and sexual health programme. The commissioning budget contributes to the maintenance of the building therefore other projects that use the building would also be put in jeopardy.

The young people said that if they could not go to Headland Future they would hang around the streets or at the park. They said that this is boring and they get told to move on or that they are making too much noise.

They raised concerns about younger people starting to use the service who would not have anywhere to go / socialise.

The young people have been involved in a number of projects organised by the service including National Citizen Service, baby project and 'tidy up the beaches'.

The young people said that going to Headland Future has improved their confidence and they wouldn't be able to access the opportunities on offer if the service was to close.

The service has a good relationship with parents. The police visit the centre and the young people have a good relationship with them.

The young people thought it was unfair that they had not been consulted about the proposal and are finding it a lot to take in.

The young people would like to come along to the next Children's Services Scrutiny Forum to put forward their views.

Save

Our fun
Will end!

our

Where
Will we
go?

He
might
lose
friends

Y

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Our friendship
will end with
the staff

It will
be boring

YOUTH

Where will
our safe
place
be?

Where will
we go?

Where
will we
see our
friends?

What
would
we do without the
Youth.

Our Fun
will end?

By Lauren Hills =)

I use the youth_ to keep out
of trouble Spend time with friends and
use the facilities Its good and has
lots of local visitors

Michael Hart.

This youth has helped me lead in
confidence ev family problems if
it closed I could lose all confidence
w/m in me self

Leah Wood

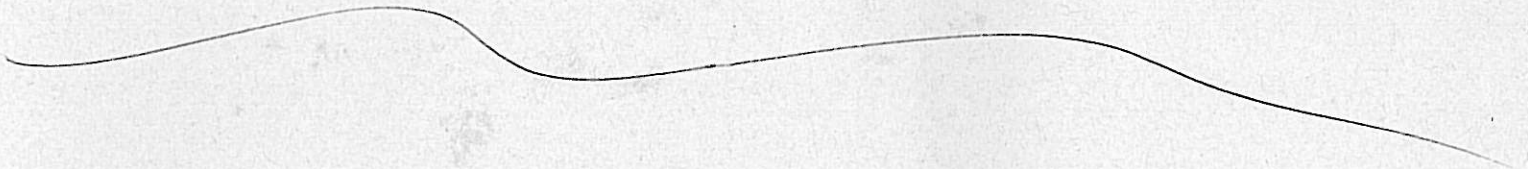
I dont want the country to close
because there will be no where
to go :(((((← crying face

DNB

If the youth closes then Monday
+ Thursdays would be boring
and ~~you~~ we will not be able to
talk about private things

~~Red~~

~~Red~~



I want abbey street youthey to stay open because if it closes we will only be ~~tr~~walking around the street and be bored but i have met loads of friends at the youthey and the staff are nice and keep us active and try and get us to do something every Monday and Thursday even though we don't have enough money! But at abbey street youthey we all socialise and get along and this is the only way i can see all my friends. On a Tuesday our staff have arranged for our own girls group and it's the night that if we have anything wrong we tell the staff. If the youthey closes we will only be hanging about on the streets getting in trouble!!!

REASON TO KEEP OUR YOUTH CLUB OPEN

I do not want our youth to close because if it does will not have anywhere to socialise, which is a bad thing because that means there can be more crime happening on the streets.

I like coming because it ~~like~~ gives me an opportunity to mix with other people. It can also affect other people who have older brothers and sisters because there could have been waiters to come for ages.

Where will
our safe
please
be?

where will
we go?

YOUTH

Our fun
will end?

re
we

Save

Our
Will

Our

What
Will
go?

We
might
lose
friends

Love

Our friendship
will end with

It

I have been a member of abbey street ~~youth~~ youth club for nearly 6 years now I would be really devastated if the youth was to be closed.

I have become really close to the members of staff and have recently started helping out behind the bar on a Monday and Thursday night sessions.

Abbey street youth center has gained me the confidence to mix with new people who I wouldn't talk to on a daily basis.

The people who attend abbey street are all aged between 13 to 19 the closure of abbey street would mean there would be a possibility that there ~~are~~ anti social behaviour records would go back up to a high standard.

Abbey street youth club also provides a place for ^{young} people to be safe and can communicate with their friends and keep out of trouble. member of the youth club can also talk to any member of staff about any problems they are having at home or at school. the youth center also provides a private and confidential sexual health service where people can come

and get free advice about sexual health
this service also provides free chlamydia
screening, condoms, pregnancy tests and advice
about any sexual problems.

Abbey Street has done many various things
through out the years like litter picks to
tidy up our beaches and the headland. It

has also took young people out on
trips such as quad Biking, Ice skating, go
ape and flamingo land, ^{and a day at a presidential} if abbey street

were to close young people who are
just turning 13, ^{would not have} the opportunity to experience
the stuff all the other teenagers
have throughout the years.

Abbey Street provides many activities on a
monday and thursday night for the
members there is a pool table, with a computer

Room, darts board, table football, ping pong and

many more facilities to keep every member
busy. There is a ^{also} ~~also~~ tuck shop where people
can buy refreshment and sweets.

I am sure abbey street wont affect you
by closing it down but it will affect
the members of staff and the people
who attend the youth club.

Thank you for reading this
Alex Harrison.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

18 October 2011



Report of: Scrutiny Support Officer

Subject: CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM
CONSIDERATION OF 2012/13 BUDGET ITEMS –
PREVENTION, SAFEGUARDING AND SPECIALIST
SERVICES - SCOPING REPORT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To make proposals to Members of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum regarding their consideration of the 2012/13 budget items chosen as part of the Work Programming process on the 24 June 2011.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 At the meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee on 24 June 2011 Members determined their work programme for the 2011/12 Municipal Year. It was decided that each Scrutiny Forum would focus its attention on preparations for the 2012/13 budget during the current Municipal Year, given the extremely challenging financial situation facing the authority.
- 2.2 Each Scrutiny Forum was requested to consider the budget proposals identified in relation to the remit of that Forum, to formulate a view on those proposals and / or to suggest ways of achieving the required savings.
- 2.3 It was agreed at the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee work programming meeting on 24 June 2011 that the following budget proposals would be considered by the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum:-
- Play Opportunities Pool
 - Youth Service Headland Futures
 - Children's Social Care Commissioning Year 3 SDO
 - Reduce the Number of Looked After Children

- Review Allowance
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- Home to School Transport
- Review of Youth Offending Service Admin and Support Services

2.4 In accordance with the timetable agreed at the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee on the 24 June 2011, consideration is to be given to the below proposal / project at today's meeting:-

- Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services (this incorporates Children's Social Care Commissioning, Reduce the Number of Looked After Children, Review Allowance, Review of Youth Offending Services Admin and Support Services, CAMHS and two additional items, workforce development and review of divisional management structure)

3. OVERALL AIM OF SCRUTINY CONSIDERATION OF BUDGET ITEMS

3.1 To provide views and / or alternative suggestions for savings, regarding the 2012/13 budget proposals presented to the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum in relation to Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services.

4. PROPOSED TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF 2012/13 BUDGET PROPOSALS

4.1 The following Terms of Reference are proposed:-

- (a) To gain an understanding of the service areas in relation to:
 - i) The current budget (as detailed in the budget book);
 - ii) Staffing information;
 - iii) Budgetary and operational pressures / challenges / priorities and statutory responsibilities (where applicable);
 - iv) The level of savings required.
- (b) To explore the budget requirements in relation to:-
 - i) The required savings (including areas where provision of services could be ceased, reduced or changed to improve efficiency);
 - ii) The potential impact of proposals / options on future service provision; and
 - iii) How the provision of service could look in the future.
- (c) To formulate the Forum's comments on the budget proposals to feed in to the decision making process; and
- (d) To provide details of, and consider, any alternative suggestions the Forum may develop to achieve the required savings in the areas identified.

5. POTENTIAL AREAS OF ENQUIRY / SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- 5.1 Members of the Forum can request a range of evidential and comparative information throughout the budget process. However, Members may wish to be mindful of the need to deal with budget proposals in an efficient and timely manner and the impact on the department responsible for the budget area, when considering such requests.
- 5.2 The 2012/13 budget will be discussed at a number of public meetings including Scrutiny Forums, Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee, Cabinet and Council. Elected Members, representatives of groups who provide and use services, residents and members of the public are welcome to attend these meetings, where consideration will be given to their views in relation to the budget proposals.
- 5.3 Evidence to be provided:
- (i) Details of the current budget (as detailed in the budget book);
 - (ii) staffing information;
 - (iii) Details of budgetary and operational pressures / challenges / priorities and statutory responsibilities (where applicable);
 - (iv) The level of savings required; and
 - (v) Details of potential options identified for the delivery of required budget savings.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT / DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY

- 6.1 Community engagement plays a crucial role in the Scrutiny process and diversity issues have been considered in the background research for this enquiry under the Equality Standards for Local Government. Paragraph 5.2 identifies the budget process route. Further details regarding the public meetings to be held to discuss the 2012/13 budget can be found on the Council's website.

7. PROPOSED TIMETABLE OF THE BUDGET PROCESS

- 7.1 Detailed below is the proposed timetable for the budget consultation to be undertaken in relation to the areas identified in paragraph 2.3, which may be changed at any stage:-

18 October 2011

To consider the Scoping Report in relation to Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services

1 November 2011

Setting the scene presentation to include:-

- (i) A detailed overview of services currently provided in relation to Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services;
- (ii) Details of the amount of required savings;
- (iii) Details of how the required efficiencies may be delivered; and
- (iv) The potential effect of efficiencies on future service provision / what the service will look like in the future.

Formulation and consideration by the Forum of suggestions to achieve the required savings.

Formulation of comments by the Forum to feed into the 2012/13 budget decision making process.

December 2011 – Consideration of Prevention, Safeguarding and Specialist Services budget proposals by Cabinet (tentative date).

8. RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 Members are recommended to agree the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum's remit of consideration of the 2012/13 budget proposals as outlined in paragraph 4.1.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background paper(s) was/were used in the preparation of this report:-

- (i) Presentation by the Assistant Chief Executive entitled 'Budget Position 2012/13' - delivered to Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee of 24 June 2011.
- (ii) Report of the Assistant Chief Executive entitled 'Selection and Timetabling of Project / Service Areas to feed into the 2012/13 Budget Process' – delivered to Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee of 24 June 2011
- (iii) Minutes of Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee 24 June 2011.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

18 October 2011



Report of: Scrutiny Support Officer

Subject: SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION INTO THE PROVISION OF SUPPORT AND SERVICES TO LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN / YOUNG PEOPLE – SCOPING REPORT

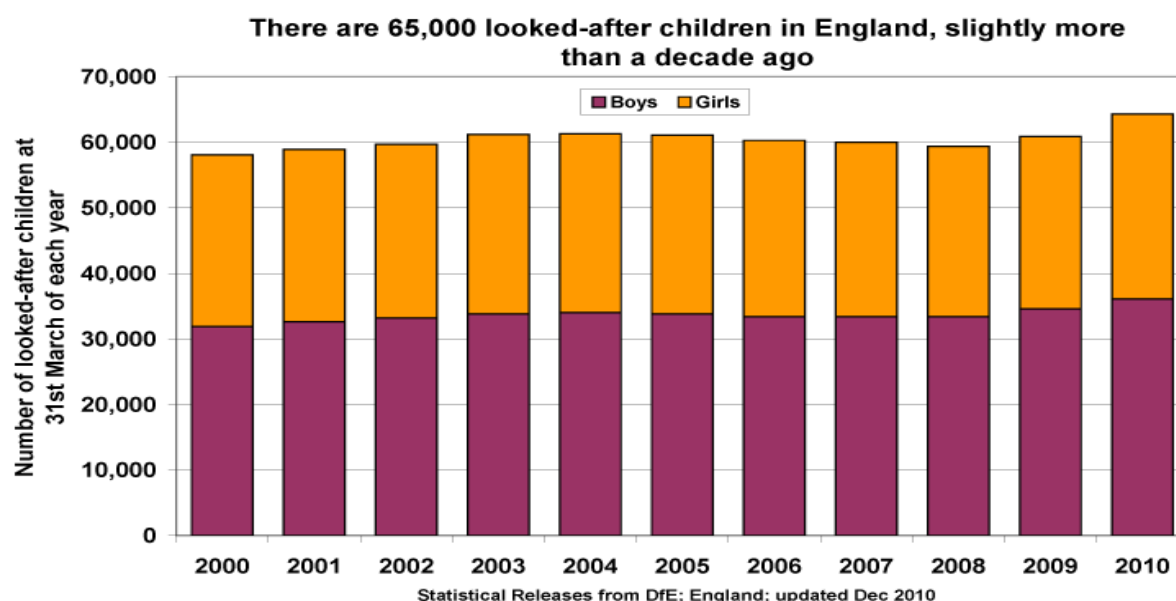
1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To make proposals to Members of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum for their forthcoming 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 60,000 children are looked after in England, as shown in graph 1 below.

Graph 1 – Number of Looked After Children in England



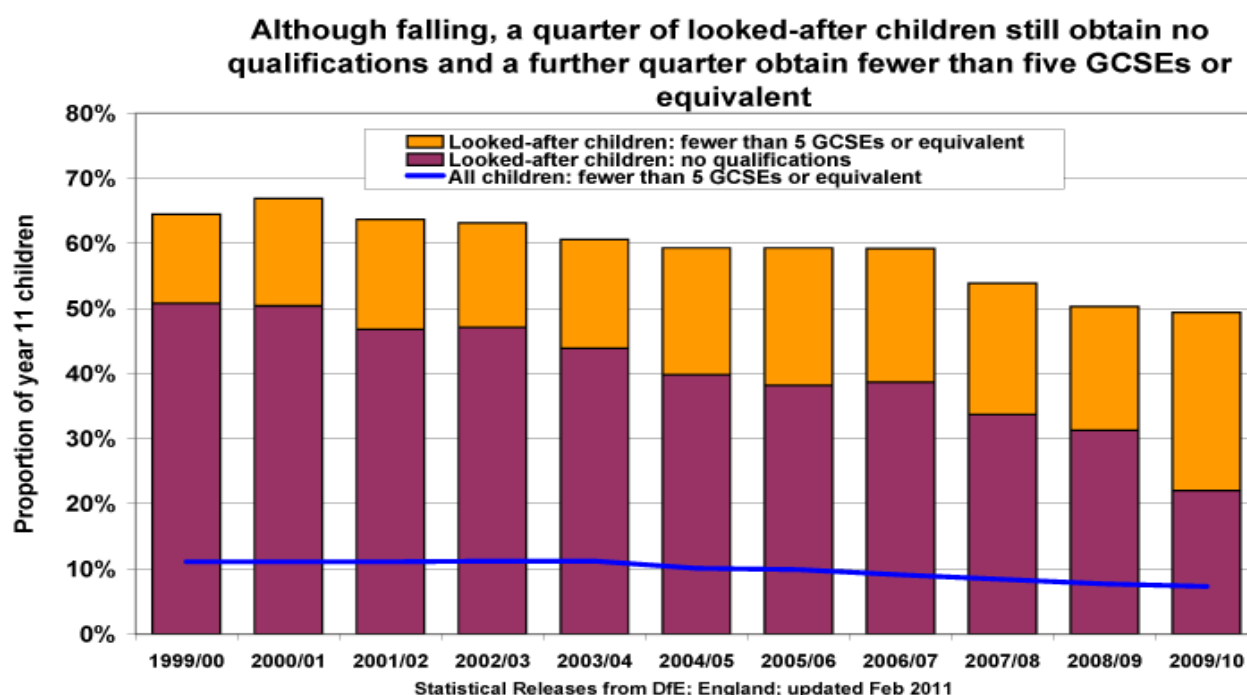
2.2 All Elected Members take on the role of 'corporate parents' to children looked after by their local authority. They have a duty to take an interest in the well-being and development of those children, as if they were their own children.

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)
- (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 In Hartlepool there are currently 173 children and young people being looked after by Hartlepool Borough Council. Of the children looked after, 87% are placed in foster care, 8% are placed in residential care and 5% are placed

with parents. 70% of the children reside within the local authority boundary. As at 30 June 2011, 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 receive family support via short break care where they receive care as part of a plan, this support is usually provided to disabled children who receive short break care at Exmoor Grove.

3. OVERALL AIM OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION/ENQUIRY

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

4. PROPOSED TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION/ENQUIRY

- 4.1 The following Terms of Reference for the investigation are proposed:-

- (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 (this is a budget item due for consideration by Cabinet in December 2011 and is scheduled for the Forum to consider at the meeting of 1st November 2011 to feed comments back to Cabinet in December).

- (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. POTENTIAL AREAS OF ENQUIRY / SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

- 5.1 Members of the Forum can request a range of evidential and comparative information throughout the Scrutiny review.
- 5.2 The Forum can invite a variety of people to attend to assist in the forming of a balanced and focused range of recommendations as follows:-
 - (a) Member of Parliament for Hartlepool;
 - (b) Elected Mayor;

- (c) Ward Councillors;
- (d) Portfolio Holder for Children's Services;
- (e) Director / officers of the Council's Child and Adult Services Department;
- (f) Local residents;
- (g) Representatives of minority communities of interest or heritage;
- (h) Housing providers;
- (i) Children's Trust;
- (j) Police;
- (k) Looked after children / young people;
- (l) Parents / family members / carers – where appropriate;
- (m) Foster carers;
- (n) Social workers;
- (o) Independent Reviewing Officers;
- (p) Young Person's Council and Junior Council – Hartlepool Children in Care Council providing the voice of local children looked after;
- (q) Corporate Parenting Forum;
- (r) Health Services;
- (s) Probation Service;
- (t) School representatives; and
- (u) Other local authorities – either in Tees Valley or a comparable local authority in the North East, for example South Tyneside, which is a children's services statistical neighbour;

5.3 The Forum may also wish to refer to a variety of documentary / internet sources, key suggestions are as highlighted below:-

- (a) Poverty website - <http://www.poverty.org.uk/29/index.shtml#def>
- (b) Hartlepool's Children Looked After Strategy – www.hartlepool.gov.uk

- (c) Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services – 16 July 2010 - <http://www.ofsted.eu/local-authorities/hartlepool>
- (d) Messages for Munro – A report of Children's Views collected for Professor Eileen Munro by the Children's Rights Director for England (**attached as Appendix A**)
- (e) Centre for Public Scrutiny – 10 Questions to ask if you're Scrutinising Services for Looked after Children (**attached as Appendix B**)

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT / DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY

- 6.1 Community engagement plays a crucial role in the Scrutiny process and diversity issues have been considered in the background research for this enquiry under the Equality Standards for Local Government. Based upon the research undertaken, paragraph 5.2 includes suggestions as to potential groups which the Forum may wish involve throughout the inquiry (where it is felt appropriate and time allows).

7. REQUEST FOR FUNDING FROM THE DEDICATED OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BUDGET

- 7.1 Consideration has been given, through the background research for this scoping report, to the need to request funding from the dedicated Overview and Scrutiny budget to aid Members in their enquiry. At this stage no additional funding has been identified as being necessary to support Members in their investigation. Members, however, may wish to seek additional funding over the course of the investigation and the (*blank*) pro forma attached at **Appendix C** outlines the criteria on which a request to Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee will be judged.

8. PROPOSED TIMETABLE OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

- 8.1 Detailed below is the proposed timetable for the review to be undertaken, which may be changed at any stage:-

18 October 2011- Evidence gathering (*to cover term of reference a*):-

(a) Scoping Report

(b) Setting the Scene Presentation 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.

(c) Evidence from the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services;*

(d) Evidence from the Member of Parliament for Hartlepool, Iain Wright*

* Subject to availability

1 November 2011 – Evidence gathering *(to cover term of reference b):-*

To explore how the Council can reduce the numbers of looked after children / young people (this is a budget item due for consideration by Cabinet in December 2011 therefore comments from this meeting will feed into the Cabinet meeting).

22 November 2011 – Evidence gathering *(to cover term of reference 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'?*

*Suggested format: - small group exercises with officers from the Child and Adult Services Department and partner organisations to evaluate the provision of support and services provided for looked after children / young people

17 January 2012 – Evidence gathering *(to cover terms of reference e and f):-*

- (a) 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;
- (b) To suggest ways of how support and services could be provided in the future to most effectively / efficiently meet the needs of looked after young people and promote improved outcomes; and
- (c) Evidence from another local authority

31 January 2012 – Evidence gathering *(to cover term of reference d):-*

To explore the views of looked after children / young people in relation to the services and support they receive.

*Suggested format: - small group exercises with looked after children / young people; foster carers and social workers to evaluate the provision of support and services provided for looked after children / young people

27 March 2012 – Consideration of Final Report

13 April 2012 – Consideration of Final Report by the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee

14 May 2012 – Consideration of Final Report by the Cabinet/Council (tentative date)

9. RECOMMENDATION

- 9.1 Members are recommended to agree the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum's remit of the Scrutiny investigation as outlined in paragraph 4.1.

Contact Officer: - Laura Stones – Scrutiny Support Officer
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BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- (a) Poverty website - <http://www.poverty.org.uk/29/index.shtml#def>
- (b) Hartlepool's Children Looked After Strategy – www.hartlepool.gov.uk
- (c) Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services – 16 July 2010 - <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/hartlepool>
- (d) Messages for Munro – A report of Children's Views collected for Professor Eileen Munro by the Children's Rights Director for England
- (e) Centre for Public Scrutiny – 10 Questions to ask if you're Scrutinising Services for Looked after Children

Messages for Munro

A report of children's views
collected for Professor Eileen Munro
by the Children's Rights Director for England



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Introduction

Roger Morgan, Children's Rights Director for England



As Children's Rights Director for England, the law gives me the duty to ask children and young people in care for their views about their rights, their welfare, and how they are looked after in England. The law also gives me the duty to ask children getting any sort of help from council social care services, as well as care leavers and children and young people living away from home in any type of boarding school, residential special school or further education college.

As well as asking children and young people for their views and publishing what they tell us, with my team I also give advice on children's and young people's views and on children's rights and welfare to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector at Ofsted, and to the government. I have a duty to raise any issues I think are important about the rights and welfare of children or young people in care, getting children's social care support or living away from home. With my team, I do this both for individual young people and for whole groups of young people.

When the government asked Professor Eileen Munro to carry out a review of the child protection system in this country, I and my team consulted children and young people in care or getting social care services, and care leavers, about their experiences and views on the questions Professor Munro was looking into. Professor Munro herself was determined that children's views should be a central part of her review and she took part in our consultation events. This report sets out the evidence from the children and young people we consulted that was fed into the Munro Review.

Our reports of children's views are all written so that they can be read easily by everyone – including children, professionals and government Ministers. You can find and download copies of all our children's views reports (and a *Young people's guide to the Independent Reviewing Officers' Handbook*) on our children's website: www.rights4me.org.

A handwritten signature in grey ink, appearing to read 'Roger Morgan'.

How we asked the children for their views

This report gives the views of children in care and care leavers at three separate events held to find out children's views for the review being carried out by Professor Eileen Munro, and Professor Munro was with us at all three events to hear the views of the children at first hand.

We held the first event in September 2010, at the Department for Education in London. We invited a group of children in care and care leavers to meet Professor Munro at the start of her review work, to talk about some of the issues she would be looking into. We asked some questions of the group as a whole, and we also asked children to put views on 'Post-it' notes on sheets around the room. There were 14 children in care and care leavers in the group, which met with Professor Munro on two occasions.

Later on during Professor Munro's review, we held two separate larger events for many more children in care and care leavers to give her their views. We discussed with Professor Munro which questions we might ask at these events to give her the children's views she needed for her review. Some of the questions we asked came directly from Professor Munro, others came from the Office of the Children's Rights Director. These events took place in March 2011.

The first of the two larger events was held at the Science Museum in London, where after a meal together, children and young people took part in a voting session in the film theatre. We presented a series of questions on the cinema screen, and the children gave their answers using the buttons on electronic pads. The overall votes for each answer were then put up on the screen for all to see. Those answers are printed out in this report exactly as they appeared on the screen for Professor Munro.

Immediately after the voting session, we held a discussion forum with the children and young people with Professor Munro, chaired by the Children's Rights Director. Children and young people gave comments and views directly to Professor Munro using roving microphones, and Professor Munro responded to their comments. We then screened a 3-D film for the children and young people, and they could have a private viewing of some of the exhibitions at the Science Museum before going home at the end of the evening.

Altogether, 123 children took part in the voting session and the following discussion at the Science Museum. Even though not everyone answered every question on their electronic pads, every question was answered by over 100 children. Out of the 110 who told us whether they were a boy or a girl, 47% were boys and 53% were girls. From the 109 children and young people who told us their age, 2% were under 12, 22% were aged 12 to 14, 46% were 15 to 17, and 30% were care leavers aged 18 or over. Fifty-seven per cent were in care at the time of the voting sessions, and 40% were care leavers (105 people answered this question, but three said they weren't sure whether they were in care or not).

The next day, we held a number of discussion groups with more children in care and care leavers at Sadler's Wells theatre in London. We went into the discussion groups after sharing lunch together. With the exception of one or two supporters or interpreters for children who needed them, the only adults with the children in each group were two members of the Office of the Children's Rights Director (one to run the group and one to take notes of the children's views), and for some of the time in each group, Professor Eileen Munro or a member of her team. We were also helped by a member of the Office of the Children's Commissioner.



We held four discussion groups at Sadler's Wells, and 46 children in care and care leavers took part in one or other of these groups. Four of these had also come to the voting session at the Science Museum.

Altogether, 179 children in care and care leavers took part in our consultations for the Munro Review.

As always in writing our reports of children's views, we have done our best to write exactly what the children and young people told us, including many quotes of their own words. We have not added any comments of our own, or from any other adults, and we have not changed or left out any views we,

Professor Munro or the government might not like or might disagree with. We are publishing this report so that everyone who wants to can see exactly what the children and young people said. You can download copies of any of our other children's views reports from our website www.rights4me.org.

After we had held our events, some people who had not been able to come to the events, or who wanted to add something to what they had said there, sent in more views to us. We have put these together and put a summary of their extra views in this report.

The first discussion group

Our first discussion group met twice with Professor Munro at the Department for Education offices in London. We discussed whether children thought social workers are bogged down by too many rules, things that carers should be able to make decisions about without having to go back to social workers, and any other messages the children and young people wanted to feed in to the review.

The group had two clear views about rules for social workers and on making decisions. They thought that **there are too many rules that say decisions should be made by social workers rather than by carers, and that too many decisions for children have to be made at too high a level in social care services.** They told us that these two things together meant that decisions that are important to children often get delayed too much, and are sometimes not made until it is too late.

Children in this group told us that they thought there were definitely many decisions that carers (children's home staff or foster parents) could very well take for the children they cared for, but which according to the rules had to go up to a social worker to decide. They also thought that the rules said that even their social workers had to get some decisions made by more senior people in social care services, and this wasn't necessary. They told us that **children in care have to get too many permissions for too many things.** As one young person put it, 'My friends just ask their mum or dad if they can do certain things. We have to ask the carers, and the social worker, and then someone even higher.' They sometimes felt that saying someone else's permission had to be asked could just be a way of saying no to something.

One major example of something that children thought rules made difficult was staying overnight with friends. They said that carers and social workers often said there was a rule that children in care can't stay overnight at a friend's house unless their friend's parents have been police checked.¹

Children in the group said that if they are being looked after by foster parents, their foster parents should be able

to make decisions for them in the same way that other children's parents do. One told us they had wanted a piercing, and this had to be sent up to their social worker for a decision. 'My mates didn't know I was in care and they kept saying, "Why won't your mum let you?" I felt terrible because I had to tell them it wasn't my mum, it was my social worker that had said no.'

Here are the main examples the children in the group gave of things that at some time their social workers, instead of their carers, had had to decide for them.

- Taking medicines or treatments
- Having a haircut
- Having a photograph taken with brothers and sisters
- Having any sort of piercing
- Having your hair dyed
- Going on holiday with your foster carer

One person in the group, who lived with foster carers, summed all this up: 'Foster carers should look after you like in a normal family and make decisions like normal parents – otherwise why are we there?'

Finally from this group, here are the further messages they gave for the Munro Review.

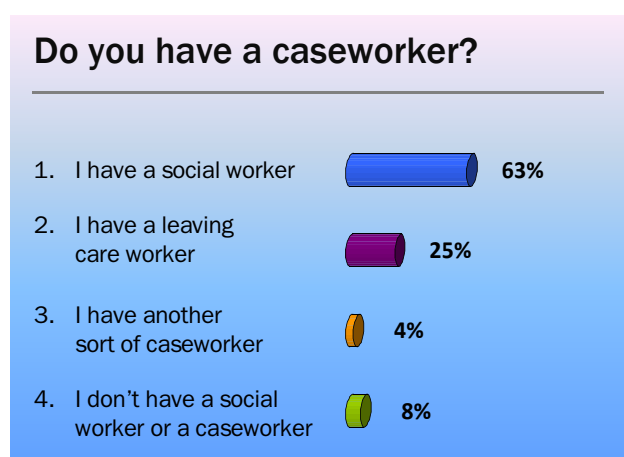
- Children in care need to be treated like other kids.
- Listen to what we say – we are not happy with care.
- Social workers do a reasonable job and get things right most of the time.
- The little things make a difference – don't let them build up so they end up being big things that are difficult to sort out.
- Don't let things drag on – it took three months to do my placement plan and I had three different social workers in six months.
- We need social workers to tell us what's happening and what we are entitled to – we often have to rely on Children's Rights Officers to tell us.
- Things happen to you and you don't know why. That just makes you feel worse.

¹ The government has never made such a rule, although it is one children often tell us has been made locally.

The Science Museum voting session

The 123 children in care and care leavers who came to our voting session at the Science Museum voted on 13 questions projected on the cinema screen. In this report we have printed the slides showing how they voted, exactly as they were projected on the screen on the day.

The first question was to find out how many had a social worker or other sort of caseworker at the time of our meeting. Here is the slide we projected just after their vote to show their answers.

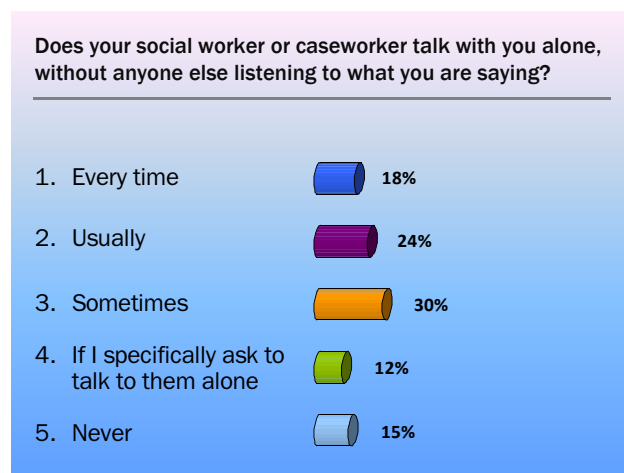


Answers to this question came from 106 children.

As the slide shows, just under two thirds of the children had a social worker, and another quarter had a leaving care worker. Eight per cent told us that they didn't have any sort of caseworker at the time they met Professor Munro.

Our next question was about whether or not social workers (or other caseworkers) usually talk with children and young people on their own, rather than, for example, with carers able to hear what is being said. We know from other consultations with children in care that children want to be able to talk to their social workers without carers or other people listening in (or being able to listen in), so that they can tell them anything that is worrying them, even if it is about their carers. Government regulations also say that social workers visiting children they are responsible for should see them alone unless there is a very good reason not to.

The next slide shows the children's answers.



Answers to this question came from 105 children.

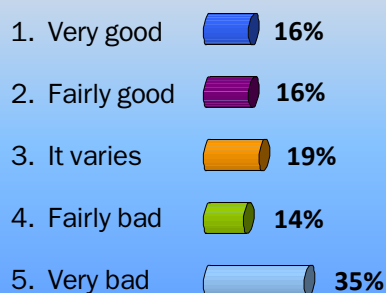
Out of the children answering this question at our voting session, only **18% said that their social worker or other caseworker always talked to them on their own**, and almost as many, **15%**, that their social worker or caseworker never talked to them on their own.

Even adding together those who said their worker does this either 'usually' or 'every time', fewer than half the children and young people (42%) said their worker usually or always saw them on their own. This was the same as the number who said their social worker sometimes saw them on their own or only saw them on their own if the child or young person especially asked to see them alone.

Something else that children and young people have often told us in our other consultations is that it is very important that social workers or other caseworkers give children information they need. This was also something that had come up in our first group meeting with Professor Munro.

Our next question at the Science Museum was about this, and the next slide gives the results.

How good is your social worker, or caseworker, at giving you information you need from them?



Answers to this question came from 108 children.

Overall, the children told us their social workers and other caseworkers were not very good at giving information they needed. Out of those who answered this question, **32% said that their workers were very good or fairly good at giving them information they needed, but more, 49%, said their workers were fairly bad or very bad at this.**

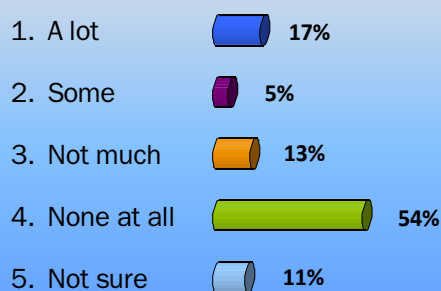
Another of the things that children and young people in our consultations often tell us is that it is very important that they are asked for their wishes and feelings about important decisions that are to be made on their lives, and that these wishes and feelings are properly taken into account when the decisions are made.

This is of course something that the law says should happen for children in care (under the Children Act 1989). Finding out and taking children's views into account is also something that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child says should happen for all children.

From our past consultations with children, we have been told that it is not only important that children's views should be asked, but that children should feel that their views do make a difference to what happens to them. Children in care have told us that this is very important to decisions about their care, and especially about the major decision to take them into care in the first place.

The next slide gives the children's answers to a question about how much difference they thought their wishes and feelings had made to the decision to take them into care.

How much difference did your wishes and feelings make when the decision was made for you to come into care?



Answers to this question came from 114 children.

The overall verdict of the children and young people at the Science Museum event was that their wishes and feelings had not made much difference to the major decision to take them into care.

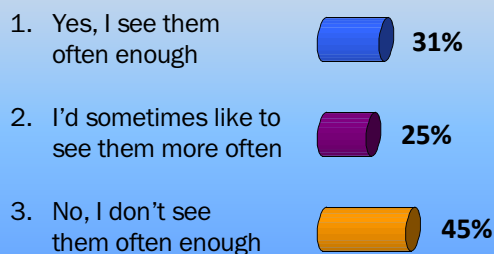
Of those that answered this question, **fewer than a quarter (22%) thought their wishes and feelings had made some difference or a lot of difference to the decision to take them into care, but 67% thought their wishes and feelings had made not much difference or no difference at all.** Eleven per cent said they did not know how much difference their wishes and feelings had made.

Something else children have often said about their social workers in our past consultations is that they want them to be easy to contact and to visit a child if the child wants them to. Some children have told us in the past that social workers often see them when there is a major problem to sort out, but not often enough to talk to them about smaller problems before they grow into major ones. This was also something that our first group had raised with Professor Munro.

There are government rules which set out by law at least how often social workers have to visit children in care, but social workers can see them more often than this.

Our next question for electronic voting at the Science Museum was simply to ask children and young people whether they thought they saw their social worker or other caseworker often enough.

Do you see your social worker or caseworker often enough?



Answers to this question came from 110 children.

From their answers, **a large majority of the children who answered the question (70%) wanted to see their social workers more often than they did. Only 31% told us they thought they saw their social workers or other workers often enough.**

Children have also said before that it is important to be able to get in touch with your social worker. The next slide gives the answers to our question about this.

Can you get in touch with your social worker or caseworker if you need to?



Answers to this question came from 109 children.

On this question, **55% of the children told us they can get in touch with their social worker or other worker, though just over half of these children said it was not easy to get in touch with them. Just under a third (31%) told us they can never get in touch with their social worker or other caseworker.**

As well as getting in touch with a worker, and getting information from a worker, it is important that children are able to get their wishes and feelings across to them. The next slide shows the answers to a question about this.

Can you get your wishes and feelings across to your social worker or caseworker?



Answers to this question came from 110 children.

More of the children and young people answering this question at our Science Museum event thought it was difficult to get their views and wishes across than thought it was easy.

Altogether, **31% said they could always or nearly always get their wishes and feelings across to their social worker or other caseworker, while 46% said they were not usually, or never, able to get their wishes and feelings across. Almost another quarter, 24%, told us that they could only sometimes get their wishes and feelings across to their worker.**

Our next question was to find out how much notice the children and young people thought their social workers or other caseworkers took of their wishes and feelings once they had got them across. We had already asked how much difference the children's wishes and feelings had made to the decision to come into care in the first place. This question was about how much notice workers took of children's wishes and feelings once they were in care or had left care.

Does your social worker or caseworker take notice of your wishes and feelings?



Answers to this question came from 109 children.

Exactly half the children (50%) thought their social worker or caseworker did not usually, or ever, take notice of their wishes and feelings. Only 24% said their worker always or nearly always took notice.

Many important decisions are made about children in care at their care reviews. The next question was about how far children thought they could get their wishes and feelings across to the people at their care reviews.

Can you get your wishes and feelings across to the professionals who do your care reviews?



Answers to this question came from 105 children.

More of the children told us they could not usually get their views across to the people at their review meetings than told us they usually could. Altogether, **45% said they could not usually, or could never, get their wishes and feelings across to the people in their review meetings, compared to the 28% who said they could usually or always get their wishes and feelings across. About another quarter (26%) said they could sometimes get their wishes and feelings across in their reviews.**

These figures are very close to the answers to the question about how easy children found it to get their wishes and feelings across to their social workers or caseworkers, although slightly more said they could get their wishes and feelings across to their workers than in their reviews.

Our last question about wishes and feelings and how much difference they made was to ask the children whether they thought their views made a difference to the decisions that were made about them once they had come into care.



Do your views make a difference to the decisions that are made about you?



Answers to this question came from 110 children.

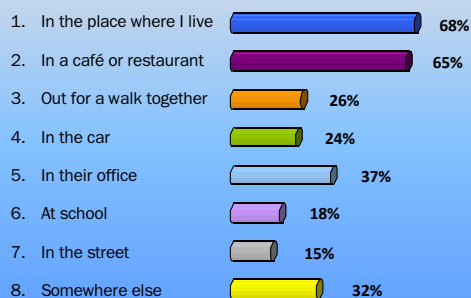
From this slide, we can see that **over half the children (53%) thought their wishes and feelings didn't usually make, or never made, a difference to the care decisions made about them, while just over a quarter (27%) thought they always or nearly always made a difference. Twenty per cent thought their wishes and feelings made a difference sometimes.**

Children's views on getting their wishes and feelings across to their workers and into their care reviews were close to their views on those wishes and feelings making a difference. Thirty-one per cent had said they could usually or always get their wishes and feelings across to their workers, and 28% could usually or always get them across in their care reviews. Twenty-seven per cent thought their wishes and feelings generally made a difference to decisions.

Knowing that children often wanted to be able to talk with their social workers or other caseworkers alone, we asked those at our Science Museum event to advise us on the best places to meet with their workers. Then we asked them to vote on good ways for professionals to find out children's wishes and feelings. Children could vote for more than one answer, and the next two slides show the results.

What is the best place to meet with your social worker or caseworker?

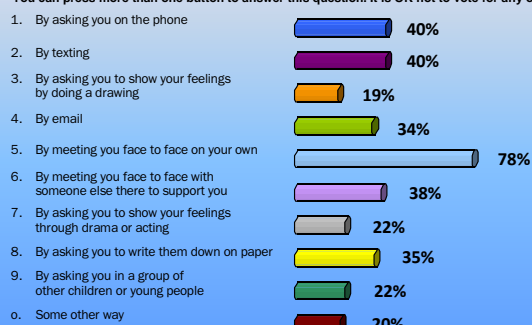
You can press more than one button to answer this question. It is OK not to vote for any of them!



Answers to this question came from 110 children.

What would be good ways for professionals to find out your wishes and feelings?

You can press more than one button to answer this question. It is OK not to vote for any of them!



Answers to this question came from 116 children.

From the answers on these two slides, the best and the least good places to meet and ways to find out children's wishes and feelings, according to the children themselves, are shown below.

Best places for social workers and caseworkers to meet children and young people

- In the place they live
- In a café or restaurant
- In the worker's office

Least good places for social workers and caseworkers to meet children and young people

- In the street
- At school
- In the car

Best ways for social workers and caseworkers to find out children's wishes and feelings

- By meeting them face to face on their own
- By asking them on the phone
- By texting

Least good ways for social workers and caseworkers to find out children's wishes and feelings

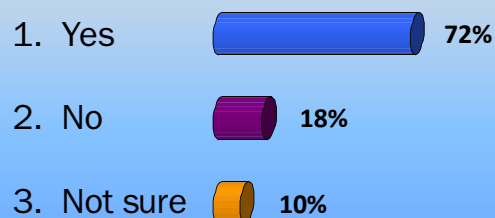
- By asking them to do a drawing
- By asking them to show their feelings through drama or acting
- By asking them in a group of children or young people



Three answers stood out above all the others. These were that **the best places for workers to meet children are where the child lives or in a café or restaurant, and that the one best way of finding out a child's wishes and feelings is to ask them on their own, face to face**. It is clear from this that best of all is to ask a child for their wishes and feelings in the place they live, but without anyone else present or listening – and if that isn't possible, to go to a café or restaurant to have the discussion.

The very last question we asked in our voting session was whether children and young people thought social workers should spend more time with children and young people. This was an issue on which Professor Munro wanted to hear children's views. Our question was about social workers, not other sorts of caseworker. The final slide sets out the answers.

Should social workers spend more time with children and young people?



Answers to this question came from 112 children.

The verdict was a very clear vote in favour of social workers spending more time with children and young people. **Just under three quarters (72%) of the children and young people answering this question voted for social workers spending more time with children and young people, outnumbering the 18% who said they shouldn't spend more time by four to one.**

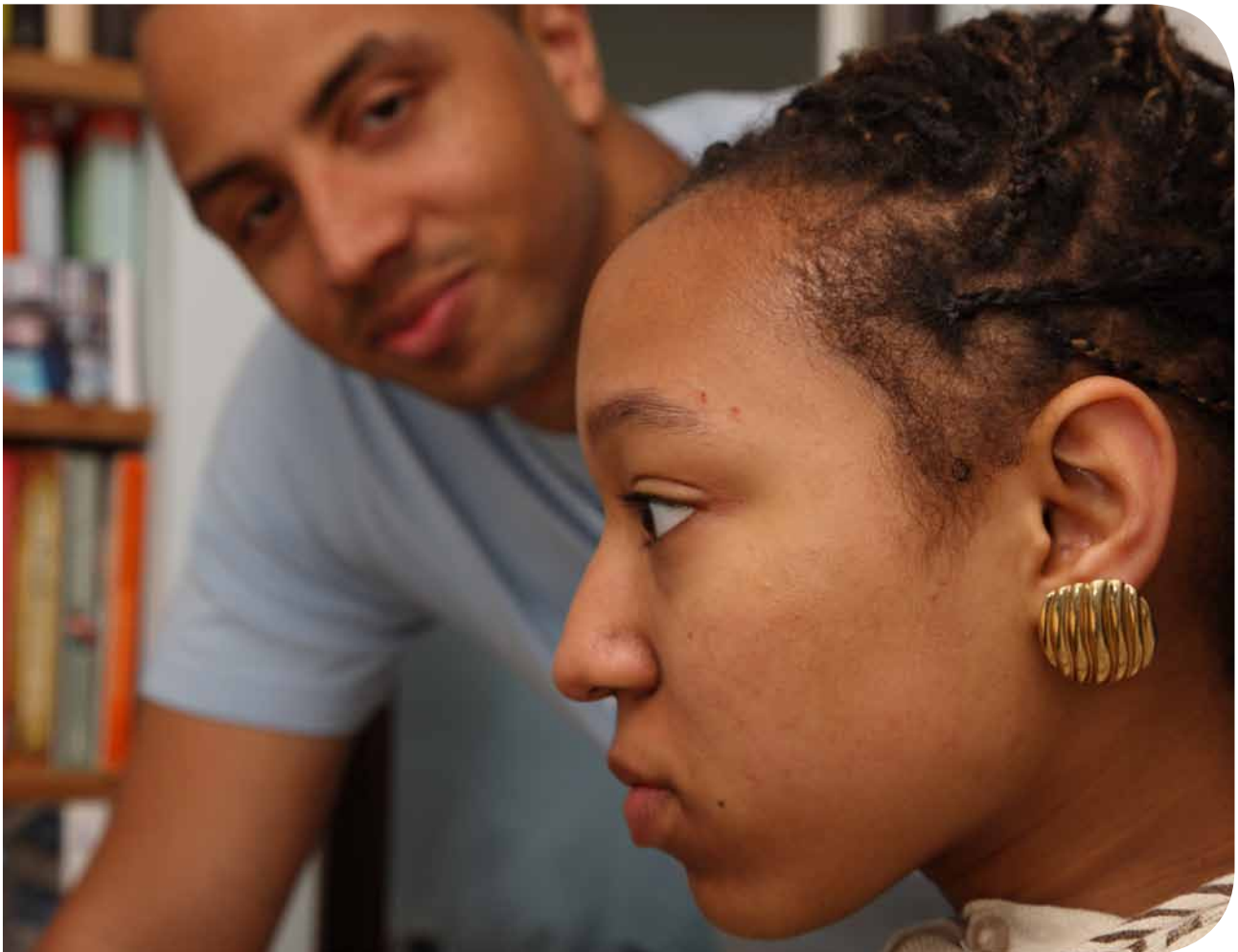
Children's discussion at the Science Museum

The children and young people who had taken part in the voting session at the Science Museum then stayed on for an open discussion forum with Professor Eileen Munro. We used this forum to give the children and young people a chance to give any messages they wanted to Professor Munro for her review.

Here is the summary of the 20 main points made by the children and young people to Professor Munro that were written down by our note-taker at the event.

The 20 points from children to Professor Munro

- Children can be scared to say some things to their social worker because these will be relayed to their carers and the children fear what their carers will say after the social worker has gone. 'How can you complain about a carer if you don't trust your social worker not to tell the carer and you are afraid of it getting back to them?'
- If you make a complaint about a foster carer, it takes too long to be sorted out, and you can suffer in the placement in the meantime – and the foster carer can be scared that there will always be something bad on their fostering record.



- Young people with care experience should be recruited as possible social workers. Care experience can be more important than qualifications.
- It is very difficult to get hold of your social worker – they are usually out of the office and you have to talk to a duty social worker who does not take action because you are not on their caseload. It would be better for each child in care to have two social workers, so they can cover for each other when one is away and the child doesn't often miss talking to a social worker who knows them, as happens now.
- Care leavers find it particularly difficult to get hold of a social worker to give them support.
- Social workers are not always good at listening to or properly recording children's wishes and feelings, but it is what the social worker thinks that gets on to the child's record.
- When children are looked after by social care services but their parents still have responsibility for them, getting things decided takes too long. There should be a blanket agreement for everyday decisions so people don't have to keep going back to parents.
- Social workers don't make quick decisions.
- How can a child in care get another laptop if theirs has been broken or taken by someone else in the home?
- Someone leaving care can lose out on support as a care leaver if they were taken out of care before they were 16.
- Children can sometimes be taken out of a good placement for reasons that aren't to do with how the placement is going. Children living with their own parents don't get moved to new placements and dumped on strangers, as can happen to a child in care several times in their lives.
- Social workers have to spend too much time on paperwork rather than with children and young people.
- Some carers are too controlling about how children in care spend their own money.
- If you live with your own parents, you gradually learn things like cooking, but young people leaving care often have to learn all of a sudden how to be independent.
- Carers should be able to sign all school consent forms without having to go back to the social worker, which can take two weeks or more.
- If a decision affects siblings, professionals tend to ask the older sibling for their views, but not the younger ones, whose views might be different.
- You can't always get hold of your Independent Reviewing Officer when you need to.
- Foster carers can miss important problems for children in their care – for instance not realising a young person is depressed, or that a foster child is being bullied by the carer's own children.
- Foster carers need to give foster children equal love with their own children.
- Current cuts make it less likely that children will see their social workers more, as most (but not all) want to, and make it more difficult for social workers to spend more time with children, as they want to. Cuts also lead to some specialists having to go.

Children's discussion groups at Sadler's Wells

This section of the report summarises the points made by children and young people in our four discussion groups at Sadler's Wells theatre. Each of the headings below is a discussion subject we introduced to each of the discussion groups for their comments.

What should be done to keep children safe?

Children told us that keeping children safe involves having safe adults around, and as one put it, having a 'safe environment to live in with safe adults'. We were told that Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks were an important way of making sure that adults – even adults in families – are safe people to look after children. Parents and carers were particularly important in keeping children they were looking after safe. As one group put it, the safety of children is often down to 'responsible adults'.

Our groups talked about the importance of many different professionals in keeping children safe. One group said that safety is the concern of everyone who is involved with children. Some saw the police as very important to keeping children safe, and thought that children would be safer if there were more police on the streets. Many spoke about professionals working

with children and helping to keep them safe, such as teachers, designated teachers and foster carers. One group thought school nurses should be brought back.

One discussion group advised that if a professional is checking on how safe a child is, they should phone the child regularly in private to see if they are OK. Another group discussed the possibility that each school could have a particular teacher to check children's safety – someone a child could go to if they were concerned about their safety, and who would regularly see each child to ask about safety issues.

In one group, the point was made that all adults working with children should be able to see the signs of a child being abused or harmed. Social workers should be trained to recognise the signs.

There was also discussion about children keeping themselves safe, and the need for children to know about various options they could take to keep safe. Examples given were always having a mobile phone with you, and making sure people looking after you know where you are. One group said that children should always have enough credit on their phones for emergencies. Children in yet another group reported



how making regular (perhaps hourly) mobile phone calls back home helped to keep them safe.

More generally, we heard that education and encouragement definitely help children to keep themselves safe. Knowledge and experience are keys to looking after yourself safely. One group advised that this education needs to focus on awareness, making children aware of dangers and how to keep safe. It should not be just telling children what to do, as they will often not do things they are told to do. It should give children the awareness to help set boundaries for themselves. One group said that even though children do not always take notice of information they are given, they should still be given information about keeping themselves safe: 'Information can keep you safe, depending on whether you listen to it or not.' It was also said that safety could be a subject that was made fun to learn.

Another message from our groups was that listening properly to children, and to their worries and concerns, helps to keep them safe.

Keeping yourself safe also included keeping yourself safe on the internet. Children told us that it was important not to accept people on Facebook that you don't know, not to cause arguments on Facebook, and to clear your internet history so people who might harm you cannot track you. Children also need to know about using privacy settings.

Many raised issues about road safety, such as having traffic lights that work and more police around roads. As there are dangers when children are out and about, adults should pick children up if they are staying late somewhere, not just let them catch a bus.

We were told that the environment can make children safe or not safe. An environment where there are drug problems, or which is disruptive, can be dangerous for children.

Children also saw having help if you were in danger, or were particularly worried, or if something had happened to you, as an important part of safety. More counselling services were important, and these need to be easier for many children to get to, so should not only be located in towns. Organisations such as ChildLine and the advocacy service Voice played an important role. One child said children need 'someone secret to talk to if you are being bullied or treated badly by family'.

'Information can keep you safe, depending on whether you listen to it or not'

One young person advised that if a child is talking to someone in any service about dangers or harm to themselves, they need to be able to speak to the same person on different occasions so that person can form a general feeling and understanding of the problem, and so the child doesn't have to repeat their story many times over. It also stops their story being twisted by being passed on from one person to another when someone else picks up the case.

Finally in this section, one discussion group told us that to keep children safe, professionals need to know more about children with disabilities.

Is it easy to find someone to talk to if you need to?

This was discussed in only one of our groups. Children in this group told us that they would usually talk to their friends if they had a personal problem. While some would want to talk to someone by telephone, this depended on whether you had enough credit left on your phone. Some in the group said that they would use a website where you could write about your problems and get advice back. Some had a special buddy scheme where they were which meant you had a particular child or young person to talk to if you had a problem to discuss. Buddying schemes meant that you could talk to 'someone that has had similar experiences and they can empathise and sympathise'. Other groups talked about school 'mentoring' schemes which meant that a child could first approach another young person who had been trained and was supported in what to do and who to tell next.

It was very important that you could get hold of someone at the time when you needed to talk to them: 'You need someone that is there when you need them.'

The group made two other points. One was that having someone to talk to was important to prevent problems, and not just needed when you already had a problem. You needed access to helpful people to talk to when you didn't have a problem. The other point was that children are often taught basic skills, such as hygiene, but that some of this teaching can make you more worried about things like your health than you were already.

Another of our groups told us that parents, brothers and sisters, and other family members, especially mothers, were the most likely adults to tell about harm happening. A child might tell 'anyone who you love'. There could also be some independent people like community wardens. The group said, 'It's good to have lots of different people.'

We know from some of our other consultations that the first person a child is likely to tell if they have a problem is a friend. This came up in one of our groups for this report. One group said that if a child tells a friend and they are in real danger, then it has to be that friend's responsibility to tell someone who is able to do something about it.

What should happen when somebody has harmed a child?

The first issue raised by children in our groups was that the right people should be told about it. A child should tell their carer if someone else has harmed them, and the NSPCC was given as an organisation that should then be told. Any adult who is told about a child being harmed should have to do something about that: 'It's down to every adult.'

Children in the group discussions told us of many different people they would feel able to talk to if they had been harmed. These included not only their friends, but relatives (ranging from siblings to grandparents), designated teachers (who might be able to do quite a lot to help as that is part of their job), foster carers, social workers, youth workers, independent visitors and, again, 'buddies' in buddying schemes. In one group, teachers were added to the list, but the group thought that they were not the obvious people to go to if you had been harmed, because they had so many other tasks.

Once it is known that someone is harming a child, children suggested a number of different actions. One was to report it quickly to the police. Another was to punish the person who had harmed the child: 'they should go to jail'; 'they should be punched back'. Another was to help and support the child who had been harmed. Yet another was to take the child to somewhere they would be safe. Foster carers could often be a safe place to go for a while.



It was important that action is taken quickly after a child has been harmed. If a child has been harmed by somebody, they could do it again. One group told us that action should be quicker, smoother and more efficient than children in the group had experienced so far, so that a child is not left suffering for as long as they had been. We also heard that in telling people what has happened, only those people who have to be told should be told.

The action that would need to be taken could include getting a restraining order on a person who has harmed a child, or making it harder for them to have any more contact with a child. If the harm is at school, the child should be moved to a different school if needs be. In order to decide on the action to be taken to protect the child who has been harmed, it will usually be necessary to investigate what has happened.

Children discussed the issue of removing a child from a family where they have been harmed. They told us that this decision needs to be made separately for each child. Sometimes it may not be necessary. It may be possible to remove the person who harmed the child, for example if the child has been harmed by a step-parent. Sometimes it may be safe to keep the child in the home, but with someone from the council visiting often to check on what is happening. Moving a child out will of course cause the child other problems, such as losing friends and family, being scared of coming into care, and feeling alone because they have to get on with their life more alone than before. Children who have been harmed might find it particularly difficult to have their lives disrupted by having to leave home as well. It may still be necessary though, as one group put it, to move a child out in order to 'remove the child from the risk'.

One group was concerned that if it is decided that nothing should happen after a child has told of harm, or there is not enough evidence for action to be taken, the situation should still be closely monitored. One child summarised this for others: 'Don't just think because nothing was proved that it's OK for the child to be at home.'

If the child who has been harmed and has to be moved out has brothers or sisters, one group told us that all of them should be moved together – it is wrong to separate siblings. Another group said that if any child has older siblings in care, then the local authority should always check on the younger siblings still at home.

One group thought that the person who has carried out abuse needs to be helped so that they don't do that again.

In deciding what action to take, one group told us that if one child has been neglected somewhere, all the children there might need to be removed, even if they haven't yet been neglected.

Most of those in our groups thought that it was also important for the child to be consulted directly about what action should be taken after they have been harmed. They should be given options, and unless they are too young, they should be asked if they want to move before they are moved somewhere. However, one group warned that it may be necessary to decide to move very young children even without asking them, and that a child may still need to be moved but be too scared to say that they want to move. Another group told us that some children wanted to be able to have a say in what happens once they have told an adult they are being harmed, but that other children wanted the adult they told to take charge and do whatever was necessary.

'Don't just think because nothing was proved that it's OK for the child to be at home'

In one group children advised that a child should be able to ask an adult what they would do if the child told them something serious before deciding whether to go ahead and tell them. They should keep having a say in what happens next, and they should be able to go back to the same adult if things get worse in order to ask them to take further action.

Children in our groups thought that children who have been harmed need help for themselves. They may need counselling. They may need the help of a psychologist. One group told us that help for a harmed child needs to come quickly. In their experience, 'some people wait ages'. They may just

need somebody they trust to talk to. Children in one group thought this could be someone like an Independent Visitor. Children told us that it is always important that someone they trust keeps explaining to the child what is happening. This can be done by someone the child didn't already know before. One group said that the child might need somebody to speak on their behalf to social care services, and to explain things to the new social worker when their social worker changes.

Our groups talked a lot about how people should talk with children who had been harmed. Children advised that they should be able to talk to someone in confidence, and that there should be discussions about different things that might be in the child's best interests, not only about the major question of whether or not they should move.

What would help children to tell someone if they are being harmed by somebody?

We heard that children don't necessarily tell people if they are scared. They may also not tell anyone if they are afraid they will not be believed. They may also be afraid that if they tell one person, then 'it'll get out wider'. Knowing that the person you tell will have to pass the information on will put some children off telling anyone. Not knowing what will happen next can stop some children from talking. Being scared of telling an adult, especially a professional adult, makes it more likely that a child will choose to tell a friend if they are being harmed.

Two of our groups quite independently told us that there is a tendency for professionals to believe adults more than they believe children. This can be dangerous if it leads to a child being sent home when home is unsafe. All sides of the story, including what children say alongside what any adults say, should be fully looked into.

A rather different point from one group was that a child needs to feel able to tell someone about being harmed while it is actually happening, and not wait until it is all over. Some children may feel safer saying



something about what has happened rather than about something that is still happening, and some may need a long time to think about it before they tell anybody. We heard that telling when it is not happening may be less likely to be believed, because it is more difficult to investigate anything and any marks on the child for adults to see are not there any more. Some children told us that many people go through it for years and later on nothing can be proved.

The children told us a number of different things would help them to tell someone about being harmed. One was that the person they could tell was someone they already knew, trusted and were friends with. One group said it would help children if they knew they could speak to someone like this in confidence. One group was clear that before they told anyone they were being harmed, they needed to know that they were going to be believed and that they would get support afterwards.

‘You can’t expect us to tell them things when we don’t know them. Trust is something you build up’

It was also important for social workers to be easier for a child to get hold of. Many told us that social workers are usually very busy people and not available in the office when children call them. ‘Just being there’ is important to a child wanting to tell about harm.

We were told that an important part of trusting an adult before you tell them about being harmed is that you trust them not to pass on information they don’t need to pass on. Some in our groups were worried that they could not always trust social workers never to pass on information that is confidential but not needed for safeguarding. If that has happened in the past, then the child is less likely to trust their social worker again, even with safeguarding information.

Another thing that would help was the setting they were in and how the discussion was held. The place it happens was important, and children told us it was easier to talk about harm somewhere that felt informal and casual, without big formal tables. It was important that the people you talked to were not wearing uniforms and badges, and did not have lots of paperwork with them, as these things put children off talking freely. In one group we were told about talking to someone you know and trust in a place it is easy to talk in: ‘they should try to take you out to... places that children are comfortable in. They need to get to know us. You can’t expect us to tell them things when we don’t know them. Trust is something you build up.’

One group said that children should have different ways open to them of telling someone, including using email and a website, as well as talking to someone face to face. Some children find it easier to write down what has happened than to talk about it. Another group suggested that the child could write a diary, or record what they wanted to say on a video. Others suggested having an anonymous helpline or a blog. Some children told us that in their school each child had an email address to tell their teacher if they had any major problems. Others in our groups thought this was a good idea, because it is easier to tell something in a quick message than to have to confront a teacher face to face. However, one group told us that if a child has been physically harmed, it might not just be a matter of telling someone; the child might need to show bruises or other injuries to someone too.

In one group we heard how some children are afraid to tell someone outright about being harmed. Instead they try to leave hints for people to pick up for themselves. One said they might write about it in a diary that they then left open, hoping someone would see.

Another help discussed in our groups was to have something to do to distract you and put you more at your ease while you were talking. Many different things were possible – having something to fiddle with or squeeze, being able to draw or create something as well as talking, or being given some chocolate to eat.

For very young children, being able to communicate things by drawing, writing something down (for example like a letter) or putting something on a computer could all help. If a translator was needed, this could be especially important if the child is very young.

We were also told in one group that there were some things that professionals had done which had immediately put the child off trusting them and talking to them. One was calling the child by someone else's name.

A different group thought it was important that the child should feel they can keep some control over what happens next if they tell an adult professional about being harmed. They thought professionals should ask the child what they want to happen and discuss it – 'not just do it'.

'It doesn't matter if you tell people, nothing will be done'

Two of our groups told us that in their experience children are not always listened to or believed when they do tell someone about being harmed. One child said, 'It doesn't matter if you tell people, nothing will be done.' Another said that children are often not believed if they tell someone that a carer is harming them: 'They don't believe what kids say. They find it hard to believe that they'll harm you because they hired them to look after you.'

How can very young children be helped to understand what is going on when professionals are making decisions to keep them safe or after they have been harmed?

One group stressed that with a very young child, it is even more important that everyone tries to make sure the child feels comfortable. There is no one way of doing that – it depends on the child.

Children in our groups said that as with all children and young people, being asked and told things by someone you trust is vital to understanding what is happening, and having your say if you can, if you are any age, including very young. If someone else is telling you things, having someone the young child trusts in the room and helping is important. There should be different ways available for the young child to communicate, at the level of the child.

One group said that very young children need professionals who are experts at communicating with very young children. In a different group, we heard that if a very young child needs to be interviewed by the police, it may help for an adult they already have a good relationship with to be involved in asking them questions and telling them things, not just police officers and social workers who are strangers to the child.

Just as older children would find it helpful to have something to distract them while talking, we were told that very young children would actually find it helpful to have toys to play with while things were being explained to them. This would help them to feel more comfortable. Young people told us that young children need activities to do as well as talking, and adults talking to them need to be trained in getting young children to open up while they are doing activities.

One group suggested that a very young child might sometimes feel more comfortable talking to an older child rather than to some adults.

If a very young child is going into care, one group suggested that it might be helpful for an older child already in care to help explain some things to them that they might need to know. It would also be helpful to tell them positive things, for example about a new bedroom they can have, as well as anything worrying. It would help too if they are taken to visit where they are moving to before they move there.

What should be done to keep children in care safe from harm?

Our groups did think there were some particular things that were special risks for children in care. One was that parents who might harm a child in care might be trying to find them. Another was that carers might not be able to cope with emotional and behavioural difficulties that many children in care have. Training for carers in how to cope with these would be part of keeping children in care safe, as well as helping carers to do their job. Sometimes carers need to tell children in care what is right and what is wrong to do to keep themselves safe. A different group advised that if children in care are in trouble, they should naturally have support available from the care system in everything they do. They may not be confident enough in themselves, and should be given help to be more confident if they need it.

Children in care have many problems that other children may not have. We heard that part of keeping a child in care safe may be protecting that child from the effects of what has happened to them in the past.

We were told that keeping children safe is the job of many care professionals. These include social workers and foster carers. But it went beyond this to elected councillors and the government, who children said both have a special job to keep children in care safe.

‘You can use a mobile phone if you get into trouble, like in the park. If someone follows you, you can ring someone to pick you up quickly’

In doing their job of keeping children in care safe, we were told that professionals need to be good at making relationships with children in care, and at communicating with them, keeping children’s information confidential and keeping promises to children. In our groups, children told us that frequent changes of social worker, social workers having their decisions for children overridden by managers, children not being able to get in touch with their social workers, and professionals not turning up to appointments they have made to see children, all damaged the vital trust and relationship that there needs to be between professionals and children to keep children safe. Children told us that they each need a few different people they can trust and go to if worried about something.



In one group, the suggestion was made that young adults who had been in care themselves should work with children in care, because children in care would find it easier to discuss harm with people who had been in care themselves.

Given the importance of mobile phones in keeping children safe, two of our groups quite separately advised that everyone in care should have a mobile phone. One younger child gave an example of how this might help if they were in danger: 'You can use a

mobile phone if you get into trouble, like in the park. If someone follows you, you can ring someone to pick you up quickly.'

In one group, we heard that regular health and eye checks for children in care are important, and show that someone cares about your health.

A key issue that came up was the importance of listening to children in care. Children who do not feel they are listened to may well start to harm themselves, or perhaps develop eating disorders. Some need the help of someone who specialises in dealing with self-harming problems. It is also important that the child can communicate easily with their carers, without the problem of child and carers speaking different languages.

Three of our groups told us that children in care are often kept safer than many other children, though they don't always agree with how this is done: 'Young people in care are a lot more safe. You're not allowed out. Every door has two locks and you can't open the windows.' Another group thought that some of the ways adults try to keep children in care safe were wrong. As examples, 'we're not allowed our photos taken. I had to sit out of a class photo because teacher didn't get permission from my social worker. I think that's really unfair'; 'kids in care can't go to a sleepover'; 'I lost a lot of friends because parents have to be checked'. Yet another group said that children in care tend to rebel against these limits being put on them – and end up putting themselves in more danger as a result.

One group was concerned that leaving care can be a risky time. Young people can be made to leave care at an early age and may rebel against the protections they have been under, while they still really need protecting. One young person said, 'When "your" child is 18 they get a car, we get kicked out!' Another said that in her experience she was over-protected while in care, and not allowed to stay with friends or go on holiday. Then when she was 18 she had to do things on her own that she didn't feel confident about. For their own safety, young people need training to leave care, and to leave care gradually not suddenly. Also, a care leaver does not have the safety option of coming back home if they can't cope, as many other young people do. Leaving care at 16 or 18, when many young people live at home with parents into their twenties, is not safe.

What questions should social workers ask you, to really find out how you are being looked after?

The groups made some general points and then supplied specific questions that should be asked.

One general point was that questions need to be asked in depth and the questioning needs to develop according to what the child says; the social worker should not just go through a list of standard questions. One person summed this up for many when they said, 'It shouldn't be a set of questions. They should start with how is life, a general question, and then build on it.' One example we were given was that asking a child about their schooling shouldn't just be asking 'how is school?', but using a first question to open up a discussion in depth with the child. Children should be asked about their placements in the same way.

Another general point was that social workers need to be trained in the sorts of questions children and young people would like to be asked, and that children and young people should be involved in providing this training.

Children also made the general point that as well as the social worker visiting the child to check that they are being looked after properly, it was important that the child could get in touch with their social worker if they felt they needed to tell them something or discuss something with them. It was suggested that children should always be given their social worker's mobile phone number to call or text them, that social workers might be accessible to children on Facebook, and that social workers should tell all the children they are working with when they are going to be away on leave.

A final general point from some people in our groups was that social workers should look at certain things each time they visit a child, as well as talking with the child. Examples would be the child's bedroom and the clothing the child has to wear.

Set out below is the list of specific questions children and young people across the groups put forward for social workers to ask to find out how they are being looked after. Taking the children's general points into account, these are meant to be 'starter questions' for more discussion, not a list of single questions to work through.

- 'Are they treating you right?' – followed up to see if there is any abuse or neglect.
- 'How is school?' – followed up with in-depth discussion.
- 'How is your placement?' – followed up with in-depth discussion.
- 'How are you getting on with your foster carers?'
- 'How are you getting on with other people?'
- 'Are there too many people in the house?'
- 'Do you have enough contact with your family, including your siblings?'
- 'Is there enough funding for your contact with your family?'
- 'Can you keep in contact with any siblings who have been adopted?'
- 'Are you having to move placement or school because of funding cuts?'
- If the child has gone to a new placement, 'How are you finding the rules and regulations in this new placement?'
- 'Does the food meet any dietary requirements you have?'

A final point on this from one group was that social workers need to be very skilful at checking whether foster children are being treated in the same way as a foster carer's own children. Some foster carers can 'put on a show when social workers are around'.

What should social workers ask you so that they can find out whether they are giving you the support you need and doing what you want them to do?

We wanted to find out what children thought they should be asked to check that social workers are doing the right things for them.

'You don't want to be using big words to a little one, and talking slowly to me'

The major point made by all our discussion groups was that it is not just important that social workers ask them if they are doing the right things, but that they actually do take action on what the children tell them. This is vital, whether they are answering a survey about the help they are getting or being asked directly by someone in person. One child said, 'I kind of wonder what happens when we tell them things.' On surveys, one (like many others) said it is important to 'take notice of the surveys they give us', and another told us, 'I filled one in to see if anyone will call me, and no one did.' One child said they had been told that after children had filled in a survey about whether they thought they were getting the right help and services, 'they put them in a box and pick one up sometimes to compare'.

One key question children put forward for social workers to use to find out whether they were helping children in the right way was to ask whether there are any improvements they need to make in what is being done for that child. One group told us that it is also very important that social workers ask children about their services in a way that they can understand, but without patronising them or confusing them: 'You don't want to be using big words to a little one, and talking slowly to me'; 'don't patronise and talk down to teenagers'.



More points about social workers

In discussing social work and how social workers can help to keep children safe, children in our groups told us more about the sorts of people they thought would make good social workers for this task. The key points that came up in different groups are listed below.

Social workers keeping children safe need to be:

- Trustworthy
- Qualified
- Able to share information appropriately
- Experienced
- Not trainees
- Good listeners
- Responsible
- Not short-term staff
- Caring
- Good communicators
- Good at empathising
- Understanding of children's issues
- Good at explaining what is happening
- Good at explaining when something the child wants to happen will not happen
- Able to communicate well with children whose first language isn't English
- Able to avoid asking the same question over again
- Ready to answer children's questions
- Able to know when children don't want to talk about something
- Available to children and seeing them often
- Willing to take action rather than putting things on file
- Parents with children of their own if possible

Children's views submitted from Herefordshire and Hounslow

We are adding summaries here of two reports sent in to us by local authority staff on behalf of children they had discussed our questions with in their own local councils.

The first report came from a discussion with seven children and young people in Hereford, who were unable to make it to our discussion group event at Sadler's Wells.

Views from the Hereford County Council group

Here are things different people can do to help keep children safe

Social workers

- Make children aware of dangers
- Be more protective of primary-age children
- Keep an eye out for dangers – but don't 'namby pamby kids'
- Do more home visits and see children are OK
- See the children away from their family
- Don't ask parents if you can speak to the children
- Do fun activities so the child will open up

Teachers

- Check that children are eating at school and aren't too hungry
- Talk to parents and build a relationship with them
- Don't tell the parents what a child has said – it could make things worse
- Be someone I can trust
- Don't tell other teachers what I've told you
- Be someone that deals with it straight away, not six days later
- Be careful how you word things – don't wind up parents the child has to go home to

- Look for children who are withdrawn or who start bullying others
- Don't get too friendly to try to get children on your side

Other people in the family

- Go to the school if the child is bullied
- Be there for the child
- Advise the child
- Look out for signs – for example if the child is hungry or dirty
- Call in out of the blue and look around the house
- If you think children aren't being fed – cook them tea once a week

School counsellors

- Give children advice on how to deal with things
- Give leaflets and phone numbers of helplines

Friends

- Stick by you and help you to be happy

Friends' parents

- Be on the lookout
- Give kids a break from their home
- Invite them round to tea
- Build up trust so the child might tell you if something is wrong

Health visitors

- Chat to parents – build up a relationship with them
- Communicate with social workers
- Call round out of the blue
- Look round the house
- Look in the fridge and cupboards

Nursery staff

- Keep an eye out for children
- Say something to social care services if a child is dirty or hungry

Doctor

- Tell people if you're concerned
- Do more home visits to see what the home is like

Police

- Keep an eye out
- Share information
- Pop into schools so the kids get used to you and trust you
- Interview children wearing plain clothes – have your badge with you

Parents

- All parents should have to do a parenting course
- There should be parenting lessons in school for everyone

The Hereford group said that if somebody has harmed a child, a family support worker should support and advise the family while the police investigate and a school counsellor counsels the child. Social workers should try to prevent a child needing to come into care by giving them skills to keep themselves safe, and teachers should keep a close eye on children and help them to catch up if they fall behind at school because they are stressed. A friend's family might support and offer respite care to the child, but the child should have a say in where they go.

The Hereford group also thought that it would help children to tell someone if they are being harmed if every school had a 'worry box' and a number children could text with worries was widely publicised – for instance, in fast food restaurants and on toilet doors. Schools could also have a drop-in group where children could raise worries, and children could keep a 'feelings diary', read by their teachers.

The group thought that to help very young children keep safe, each child could have a 'keeping safe' book to read and re-read, there could be cartoons on TV about keeping safe, professionals should use the right language for the child, and they should make sure children understand that it's not their fault if they are abused.

As well as ideas that we have already listed in this report, the Hereford children suggested that looked after children should have a peer group to support them, and that Independent Reviewing Officers should check up on children in care by seeing them regularly.

The group added some further thoughts to the questions already listed in this report for social workers to ask in order to check that children are safe. Their additional questions were: 'do you feel happier than you did last time I saw you?'; 'talk me through a typical day for you'; and 'tell me one good thing and one bad thing that is going on for you at the moment'. To find out whether the social worker is doing what they need to do for the child, they should ask, 'who gives you the support you need?' and 'what else can I do to help you?'.

The Hereford children also talked about the time they first came into care. Examples they gave of the best things about coming into care were having their own bedroom, feeling safe, not being beaten up any more and learning how to behave better. They said what should have been done better was their social worker seeing them more often until they were settled, having more contact with their siblings and being rescued years earlier than they were.

The group made many of the points about social workers that are already in this report, but added that they should know about the law and about the life of children in care. Their final proposal was that when children are talking about their bad experiences, they should be allowed to swear because they might be expressing a lot of anger.

The second extra report was from staff in Hounslow telling us what children in care and care leavers in that London borough wanted to say to the Munro Review.

The children and young people who contributed to the Hounslow report made two major points. First, they advised that all professionals working with children in care and care leavers should be given compulsory training delivered by young people, to get them to see the care system from the young people's point of view. They had experience of delivering such training themselves using the 'Total Respect' materials.

Their second major point was that there need to be ways for foster children to say what they think about their foster carers, without the fear of that putting them in a difficult or awkward position. They were concerned that if they raise any negative points about their foster carers, their social worker will tell the foster carers. They said this fear is causing children, especially younger or less confident ones, to stay quiet in placements where they are unhappy.

Hounslow added to their report that in this time of cuts, neighbouring councils should work together more to deliver services, and to share the best bits of what they do.



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Children and young people

10 questions to ask if you're scrutinising services for looked after children

Introduction

This guide has been commissioned by Local Government Improvement and Development (LG Improvement and Development) and written by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS). It follows on from a previous guide produced by CfPS for LG Improvement and Development on scrutiny of children's safeguarding services, and forms part of a suite of offers for elected members and others around children's services.

LG Improvement and Development supports improvement and innovation in local government, focusing on the issues that are important to councils by working with them to develop and implement sector led support and challenge. The leadership and development programme for councillors is a key part of this. The Centre for Public Scrutiny is an independent national charity which carries out research, supports on-line networks and provides training, development and events to promote and improve public scrutiny and accountability across government and the public sector.

The author of this guide is Jessica Crowe, Executive Director of CfPS, and valuable comments, examples and advice have been provided by Claire Burgess of LG Improvement and Development and a group of elected members, officers and looked after children. Members of this group include: Rob Davison, Adam Hadley, Rob Mack, Sarah Morris, Julia Regan, Andrea Thwaite, Suzanne Triggs, Caroline Webb, Councillor Les Lawrence, Councillor Andrea Milner, and

looked after young people from Cheshire West and Chester. Thanks are due to all those who contributed their time, experience and expertise. Any mistakes are the author's own.

The guide is one of a series of '10 Questions to ask if you're scrutinising...' guides produced by CfPS on a range of topics. The guides aim to provide clear and succinct advice for scrutiny members and officers on the key issues to cover in a scrutiny review of that topic, as well as jargon-busting, links to further information and case studies.

The ten question areas and their detailed questions can be used by overview and scrutiny committees (OSCs) to scope a review that takes an overview of all services relevant to looked after children, or to focus on an area of particular interest. The questions can also be used to gather information during the course of the review and to frame evidence sessions with witnesses.

Please note that to the best of the author's knowledge all information is correct at the time of printing. However, it was produced shortly after the election of a new government in 2010 and the new government has committed to publishing a revised set of slimmed down guidance relating to care planning in March 2011. Readers are advised to check Department for Education website (www.education.gov.uk) for the latest information.

Key points

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 60,000 children are looked after in England, although some 90,000 pass through the care system each year.

When they are elected, all councillors 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. Although the lead member for children's services has particular responsibilities, the responsibility to act as corporate parents is held by all councillors, regardless of their role on the council.

Overview and scrutiny offers a key way in which councillors can fulfil this responsibility, by giving councillors the opportunity to ask searching questions of a range of service providers and assure themselves that children in the care of the local authority are being well looked after.

Overview and scrutiny also offers opportunities for councillors to hear directly from children looked after by the authority and to ensure that their voices are heard when considering the effectiveness and impact of services. This should include not just children's care services, but other areas which may have an impact on the lives of children in care (and leaving care), such as housing provision, crime and feeling safe in

the community, access to public transport, the quality of schools and leisure activities.

In March 2010 the government introduced new regulations and guidance to improve the quality and consistency of care planning, placement (where and how children are looked after) and case review for looked after children. It includes statutory guidance on independent reviewing officers, the 'sufficiency duty' requiring local authorities to ensure there is enough accommodation locally for looked after children, as well as guidance on improving their educational attainment.

This was part of the implementation of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and the Care Matters White Paper, and it updated and consolidated previous guidance around the 1989 Children's Act and other legislation. Slimmed down guidance is anticipated from the new government by April 2011. At time of writing the 1989 Act, 2008 Act and March 2010 guidance provide the basic statutory framework governing services for looked after children.

This document also refers to a number of performance indicators for children's services which were part of the National Indicator Set. These NIs are to be replaced with a single agreed list of 'Whitehall data requirements'. Authorities may still want to collect such information to help them manage and compare their own performance so the references to NIs have been left as they mostly capture the key performance questions.

Jargon-busting

'Looked after children', 'children in care'

The term children in care includes: all children being looked after by a local authority; those subject to a care order under section 31 of the Children Act 1989 (see below); and those looked after by a voluntary agreement with their parents under section 20 of that Act. They may be looked after by family members, foster carers or staff in a residential children's home. Children and young people from overseas become 'looked after' if they have no one with parental responsibility in this country.

Children 'at risk' of harm

These are children about whom there are concerns that they are or may be at risk of suffering harm through abuse or neglect. Children considered 'at risk' have a Child Protection Plan which should be regularly reviewed.

'Children in need'

Children in need are a wider group of children and young people who have been assessed as needing the help of services to achieve a reasonable standard of health or development. They have a Child in Need Plan to address the difficulties identified in the assessment

'Care leavers'

Care leavers are those who have been in public care for at least 13 weeks from the age of 14 onwards and therefore qualify for services to support them once they leave. This may be at 16 or up until 24 if they remain in full-time education.

Care Order – Section 31 Children Act 1989

Care Orders are made by the court if a 'threshold of significant' harm is reached and there is no likelihood of improvement in the standard of care provided for a young person. The local authority then shares parental responsibility with the parent(s) and can make the decisions that a parent would normally make. A Care Order expires when the young person reaches 18 (or sometimes 19) years of age, or when an Adoption Order is made and the child is permanently adopted.

Interim Care Order – Section 38 Children Act 1989

If the local authority is concerned that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer 'significant harm', they can apply to the court for an Interim Care Order, which is a time-limited order renewed while care proceedings for the child continue through the courts and other authorities.

Emergency Protection Order Section 44 Children Act 1989

An Emergency Protection Order removes a child into accommodation provided by or on behalf of the local authority and is granted by the court if there is reasonable cause to believe that the child is likely to suffer significant immediate harm.

Regulation 33 visits (now regulations 29-33)

What used to be known as 'Regulation 33' visits are the management inspections that have to be made regularly of residential care homes, and during which the visitor should speak to any staff and residents who may be present during the visit.

The 'sufficiency duty'

This is a duty placed on local authorities under 22 (G) of the Children Act 1989 (amended by the 2008 Act) to ensure there is sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of their looked after children. Sufficient accommodation must be provided 'where reasonably practical' (lack of resources is not considered a barrier), and having 'regard to the benefit of having a number of providers and a range of accommodation'.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)

The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 requires local authorities to appoint a named IRO for each looked after child who will spend time with that child prior to any review of their care plan so that they personally establish the child's wishes and feelings and can ensure that these contribute to the review.

The Pledge

The Care Matters White Paper envisaged the Pledge, or as young people preferred to call it, 'the promise', as a key communication tool between children and young people and the authority responsible for ensuring they receive the parenting they need. Every child and young person's care or pathway plan must reflect how the commitments made in the Pledge will be delivered for that individual child and it will be monitored by the local Children in Care Council (see below).

Children in Care Councils

The Care Matters White Paper and the subsequent Act required local authorities to set up a Children in Care Council to enable regular, good quality dialogue and involvement in developing and delivering services. There should also be mechanisms in place for involving young people in care in the recruitment of key staff members, such as the Director of Children's Services. The local Children in Care Council will be responsible for helping develop and monitor the implementation of the Pledge to children and young people about the care they receive.

Commissioning

The process by which an authority decides what level and type of services it wants in order to meet identified needs, and seeks providers of those services, often through a competitive process. Increasingly this is done jointly, for example with the local health service, and in the context of looked after children should be focused around the needs of individual children. Commissioned services should be monitored and evaluated, and the process of decommissioning is also important to understand.



**10 questions to ask when
you're scrutinising issues
and services affecting looked
after children.**

1

How well does your authority do in commissioning or providing services for looked after children, including in comparison with other similar authorities?

There are currently a number of national indicators of performance which enable you to assess how well your local authority is doing in comparison with others (although these are to be replaced with a smaller set of "Whitehall data requirements"). These can be useful in analysing trends and seeing if your area is significantly different from other similar areas. As corporate parents, councillors need access to this basic performance information to enable you to ask questions of those responsible, but bear in mind that scrutiny should not duplicate the work of the council's own performance management. Ofsted reviews can provide a useful source of information on performance and trends but data needs careful interpretation as performance depends strongly on context.

- How many looked after children are there per 10,000 children?
- Who are your looked after children in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, religious or cultural background and disability, and what needs and challenges does this profile present?
- What percentage of looked after children cases are reviewed within the set timescale? (NI66)
- Do children understand what's happening in their reviews and what's going to happen as a result of their case review? Does anyone ask them this?

Commissioning of services is becoming increasingly important and members need to ensure that arrangements are robust and secure 'value for money' (particularly in the light of current and future cost pressures) and also that they work in the best interests of the children.

- How many services are jointly commissioned, either with other authorities or with partner agencies such as the Health Services?
- How will any changes in local health service structures, for example the proposed move to GP commissioning, impact on any joint commissioning arrangements?

Cost comparisons can be a good indicator of how effectively your authority is providing or commissioning services, for example:

- How much does it spend on court costs compared with other similar authorities and why?
- What level are directly commissioned foster carers' fees set at and how much is spent on private and voluntary sector fostering agency fees?
- What is the cost of your residential provision by comparison with other areas?
- How much do you spend on out-of-area placements for looked after children? Is this rising or falling?

2

How well do your children in care do at school, both academically and in terms of other kinds of achievements?

In 2008, 14 per cent of looked after children achieved five A*-C grades at GCSE, compared to 65.3 per cent for all children. Ensuring looked after children have the right support to be able to participate fully in school life, and that their school career is not disrupted by constant placement moves can make a big difference. They may well have lost out on education because of the circumstances which led to them entering care and need help to catch up – a high proportion of looked after children see entering care as having been good for their education.

- What results are achieved by looked after children compared with other children at local schools, eg what proportion of looked after children get 5 A*-C GCSEs (NI101)?
- What plans does the council have to raise the educational attainment of looked after children?
- Are looked after children able to attend homework clubs and what support is provided to gifted children as well as those who may need to catch up? What difference is this support making?
- Do you know how well looked after children do at school if they are in placements outside your local authority area and attend non-local schools?
- How do schools' admissions policies treat looked after children, for example are they able to attend the same school as other children in their foster family, and how

many looked after children get into the highest performing schools?

- How do the admissions and other policies of any local academies, foundation schools or new 'free schools' treat looked after children?
- Do you have a 'virtual school head' (a post designated to look after all looked after children in schools across the local area, as if they were in a single school), designated teachers and designated school governors in place? How effective are these arrangements?

In one authority looked after children often missed out on after school activities and trips because of delays in getting permission from social services. As a result of the scrutiny review which brought this to light, social workers signed blanket permissions, enabling foster carers to sign permission slips for individual activities and ensuring looked after children could take part.

Celebrating the non-academic achievements of children in care and enabling them to benefit from all the opportunities school can offer is also important. Children in care should be cared *about* and not just cared *for*.

- Are looked after children able to participate in after-school activities and enjoy learning and achievement in all its forms? If not, what are the barriers?

- Does your council have a way to celebrate the achievements (whether sporting, academic, musical, attendance, personal bests) of looked after children, and are councillors given regular updates?
- What do looked after children and young people themselves say about school?

In one authority a young person was unable to attend an after school photography course because for two years no-one would buy her a camera: when this came to light during a scrutiny review, councillors intervened and got action taken to sort it out.

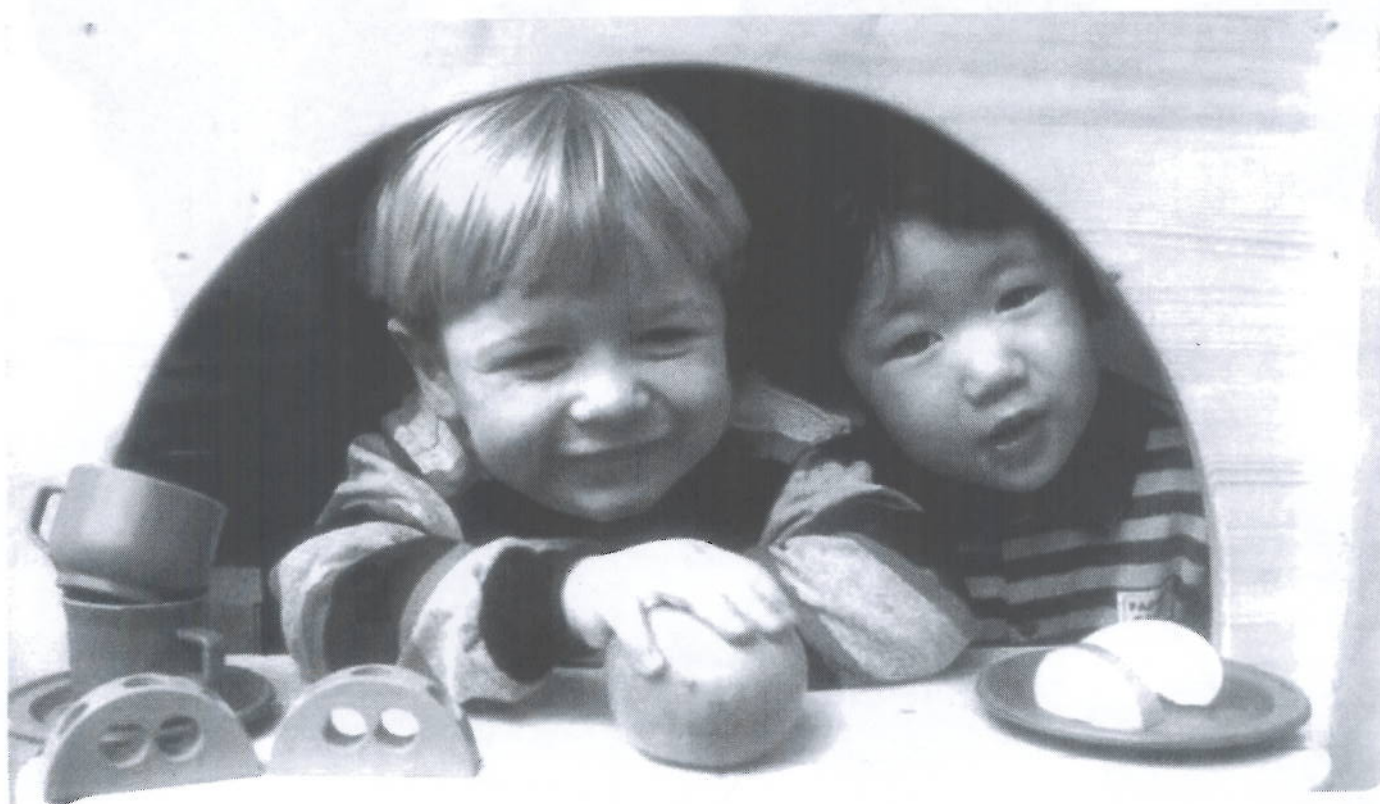


3

How good is the health and wellbeing of children in your care?

Looked after children and young people share many of the same health risks and problems as their peers, but they frequently enter care with a worse level of health due to the impact of poverty, abuse and neglect. Evidence suggests that looked after children are nearly five times more likely to have a mental health disorder than all children. Local authorities, primary care trusts and strategic health authorities must currently have regard to statutory guidance issued in November 2009 on promoting the health and well-being of looked after children, which requires children in care to have a personal health plan.

- Are looked after children a priority group for getting access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and how long are waiting times for referrals?
- As an at risk group, what access do looked after children and young people get to services to help with substance misuse, sexual health and teenage pregnancy?
- What support is given to foster carers and young people themselves about promoting healthy lifestyles?
- What do looked after children and young people themselves say about their health needs and priorities and how well they are met?



4

How stable and secure are the lives of your looked after children while they are in your care?

When children and young people enter care and are placed either with foster carers, in residential homes or even at boarding school, they often lose regular contact not only with their family members but also with other familiar friends, teachers etc. This is exacerbated if the 'placement' has to be out of the area, perhaps because of a lack of local foster families or places in residential homes. If the placement breaks down, they may have to move again, causing yet more anxiety and disruption. Ensuring placements are stable and work well for children and young people is therefore key to their well-being. There are a couple of indicators that your council currently has to measure its performance against but also other issues to explore.

As a result of one authority's scrutiny review, a looked after children and care leavers' drop-in centre was developed, to provide a safe space for looked after children and young people to go to find out information and meet support workers and others in one place.

- What percentage of looked after children move placements three or more times during a year ie how stable are your placements? (NI62).
- What percentage of children live in the same placement for 2 or more years? (NI63).
- What choice and information do children and young people have about their placements, eg do they get to meet potential foster carers or visit children's homes before they go to live there?
- If children have to move placement, what arrangements are made to keep them at the same school, for example transport?

5

How well does your authority do at finding appropriate adoptive families for children for whom it is decided this is the right option?

If a child or young person's birth family relationships have completely broken down then the best option for a long-term stable family environment may be permanent adoption. Nationally, however, there is a mismatch between the profile of children looked after and prospective adopters. The law governing adoption is in the Adoption and Children Act 2002, which aligned adoption practice with the 1989 Children Act, making the welfare of the child the paramount consideration.

- What percentage of children are placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision to adopt and are subsequently adopted? (NI61).
- How long does it take to make the decision to place a child for adoption, particularly for new-born babies?
- What is the profile of the children in care compared with prospective adoptive families, and if there is an imbalance, what steps are being taken to address this, eg to recruit more adopters by emphasising the positive messages about the process and value of adopting?
- How are sibling groups treated and what steps are taken to ensure they stay together, whether in adoption, fostering or residential care?
- What cross-border arrangements are there for adoption, including overseas?
- What do children and young people, for example in your local Children in Care Council, say about adoption processes?



6

How well do your foster care arrangements work?

Nationally, the proportion of children in care placed with foster parents as opposed to residential homes has risen to about two-thirds. This is partly due to the comparative costs of the two options but also due to a changed policy approach, as fostering enables children and young people to live in a family environment rather than an institutional one.

Foster carers can play a hugely valuable role in stabilising and caring for children from disrupted home environments for both short and longer periods of time, but nationally there is a shortage of people willing to take on the role. In the 1990s, independent / private fostering agencies developed, which placed pressure on local authority budgets as their fees were higher than those paid directly to councils' own foster carers. Issues around support for foster carers, the rate of fees and allowances and their access to information may all play a role in ensuring they can support the children they look after in the most effective way.

An area of growing concern is around private or kinship fostering, where children stay with extended family or friends in a private, often informal, arrangement, as this is an under-regulated area. Teachers or the local GP may realise that a child is no longer living at home with their parents but often the information is not passed on and there is no way of knowing whether the arrangement is in the child's best interests.

- Do you have a sufficient pool of suitable foster carers locally to meet the needs of and match the children needing placements? If not, what steps are being taken to address this?
- What support is given to your foster carers and how easily can they access it, for example therapeutic support and help?
- What do foster carers themselves say about the support they receive, including out-of-hours support and about their relationships with social workers and other professionals?
- Is there more 'in-kind' support that would facilitate and make the fostering role easier, such as bus passes, access to leisure centres etc?
- What do looked after children and young people themselves say about their experience of fostering?
- What does the authority or other agencies know about any kinship fostering arrangements and are people encouraged to share information or concerns?

Dreamwalls project in Southampton provides 'time-out' breaks for foster carers and has reduced by 95 per cent the proportion of foster carers leaving fostering. The cost equated to £674.43 per child per year, and 182 children received the service. Using the social return on investment (SROI) method of calculating value and benefits as well as costs, there was a £1.63 return for every £1.00 invested in the project.

7

How good is the standard of any residential care provided or used by your authority?

Despite the move away from large residential institutions, many authorities have retained smaller residential units which may be suitable for children and young people who find it difficult to cope with family-based life as a result of their experiences. Councillors have said that taking part in what are known as 'Regulation 33' visits or other arranged visits to homes can really bring to life what it is like to live in residential care, although they have to be carried out with sensitivity. Ofsted inspects residential homes and these reports (along with the reports from Regulation 33 visits) should provide a source of information and assurance to scrutiny about the standard of care provided there.

In Kirklees, looked after children can access the KicK (Kids in care Kirklees) website. From here they can go on a virtual tour of all the residential homes by watching a video made and narrated by looked after young people who live there, to tell them what it's like. The website also enables them to 'rate' their reviews and foster placements on-line, as well as read, listen to and watch first hand accounts of children and young people's experiences of care.

- If children and young people are placed in residential homes out of your area, particularly if they have to go to schools under a different education authority, what information do you get about how well they are doing or about the standard of the homes where they live, and what influence do you have to improve things?
- What do looked after children and young people themselves say about their experience of living in residential care?
- How are any complaints about standards of care in residential homes and issues such as bullying dealt with? How many are there and what happens as a result?

8

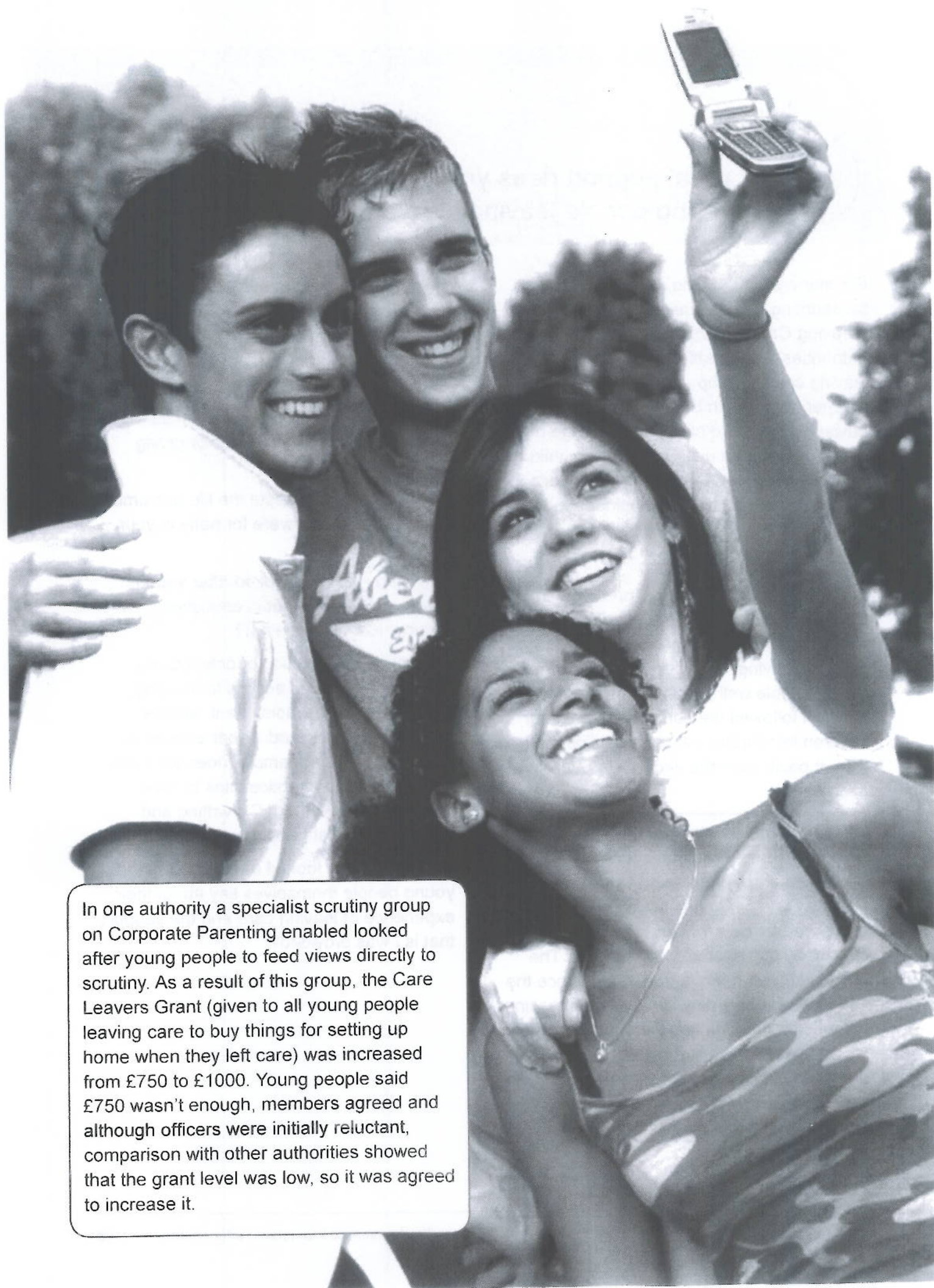
What support does your authority provide to young people leaving care and how effective is it?

For many young people, leaving care can be daunting and confusing. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 sets out local authorities' responsibilities to help children leaving care develop a 'pathway plan' to independence, with the help of a personal adviser. While care can end at the age of 16, it will continue until age 18 if the child remains at school. Continuing assistance with education or training continues to the end of the agreed programme, even if it takes some past the age of 21.

Care leavers are still over-represented in prison populations and the unemployed, demonstrating that the experience of being in – and leaving – care still does not prepare young people well for adult life. If looked after children followed the same paths as other children into further education, training and jobs, it could save the economy £50 million each year.

In Rotherham, scrutiny called representatives from Job Centre Plus, the council's Revenues and Benefits and Care Leavers Services to a hearing following concerns expressed by care leavers about distress caused by late payments of benefits. The NCH Bridges Project reported that since the intervention of scrutiny, delays in processing benefits for care leavers were much reduced. As well as reducing the further risk of social and financial exclusion to vulnerable care leavers, there was also a reduction in the number of emergency payments to care leavers.

- How many care leavers is your authority still in touch with a year after they have left the care of the authority? How many are they in touch with after three years?
- Are former looked after children ever asked to help children currently in care by talking about their experience or giving advice?
- What do you know about the life outcomes of the children who were formerly in your authority's care?
- How many formerly looked after young people are NEETs (not in education, employment and training)?
- What support do young people leaving care receive around access to housing, tenancy support, employment, access to benefits, further and higher education and training? For example, does the local authority offer apprenticeships to care leavers or support with CV writing and interviews? What happens as a result?
- What do former looked after children and young people themselves say about their experience of leaving care and the support that is / was provided?



In one authority a specialist scrutiny group on Corporate Parenting enabled looked after young people to feed views directly to scrutiny. As a result of this group, the Care Leavers Grant (given to all young people leaving care to buy things for setting up home when they left care) was increased from £750 to £1000. Young people said £750 wasn't enough, members agreed and although officers were initially reluctant, comparison with other authorities showed that the grant level was low, so it was agreed to increase it.

9

How effective is your professional workforce of social workers and others responsible for running services for and working with looked after children?

Many authorities have struggled to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of suitably qualified social workers to manage their workload and do the difficult job of working with vulnerable children. This can be a key cause of poor performance around reviewing cases on time and picking up and acting on issues raised by children, foster carers and others. While senior officers are responsible for managing staff and services, members can play an important role in checking that officials beyond social services departments are aware of their responsibilities to looked after children, for example in housing departments, environment and leisure services, education, legal services and the health service.

- What are levels of social work staff vacancies, turnover, stress-related sickness, use of agency staff and ratios between newly qualified and experienced social workers and what action are management taking to address these? Are they learning from innovative schemes elsewhere to manage staff resources most effectively?
- What continuity of social worker support is there for looked after children and what are the case loads carried by social work staff?
- Is there evidence that staff from across the authority and other partners are working together to deliver what looked after children need?
- What attitude do social workers have to their work? Do they enjoy working with children and young people?
- Do they have time for therapeutic work with looked after young people or do they get bogged down in paper work and what management action is taken to address this?
- What do looked after children and young people, foster carers and prospective adopters say about their experience of engaging with social workers and other professionals?
- Are looked after children and young people involved in recruitment and development of services?

10

What more could be done to fulfil the council's responsibilities as a 'corporate parent'?

It may be impossible to expect all elected members to share the same level of commitment to the issue of looked after children. However, they do share the same level of responsibility and so there are certain basic expectations of the systems, processes and support that should be in place to enable them to fulfil that role. As former Secretary of State Frank Dobson MP's original letter to all councillors about their role as corporate parents, launching the Quality Protects Programme in 1998, said:

"Elected councillors have a crucial role. Only you can carry it out. You can make sure that the interests of the children come first. You bring a fresh look and common sense. As councillors you set the strategic direction of your council's services and determine policy and priorities for your local community within the overall objectives set by Government."

Crucial to fulfilling this role is ensuring councillors can hear directly from looked after children about what matters to them. This could be through informal discussions, visits by elected members to residential homes or involving looked after children and young people when reviewing services of interest to them.

It is not only councillors who are corporate parents. Council officers across the council (not just in children's services departments) share in the responsibility and other partners also have a duty to cooperate to ensure looked after children's needs are met.

- Do looked after children and young people know who their 'corporate parents' are? What do they say about what they expect from local councillors and others acting as their 'corporate parents'?
- Do all members receive mandatory training on their roles and responsibilities as corporate parents when they are elected and is this refreshed during their term of office?
- Are there appropriate opportunities for elected members to meet and listen to looked after children and young people, and to celebrate and praise their achievements when they do well?
- Is there an active Children in Care Council which regularly meets with elected members and others in authority (across the council and other partners) to express the views and needs of looked after children locally?
- How are children and young people's complaints responded to and what is learnt from them?

One authority has encouraged councillors to 'adopt' a residential home in order to encourage greater responsibility for and interest in each home by elected members and provide continuity between visits. These members could be important witnesses to any scrutiny inquiry.

Case studies

LB Camden

Corporate Parenting Scrutiny Committee

Children Looked After by Camden – early scrutiny pilot examining Camden's performance as a corporate parent. The review took written and oral evidence, members visited children's homes and other consultation events, and sent questionnaires to LAC, care leavers and foster carers. Report available on LB Camden website: <http://tiny.cc/jsntm>

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Scrutiny Review Group

The Role of Councillors as Corporate Parents – a review that compared Rotherham's performance with other authorities. It heard from looked after children and young people, foster carers and others, and recommended a clearer focus and commitment, including more regular opportunities for members to meet looked after children. Report available in CfPS library: <http://tiny.cc/6pfck>

Derby City Council Children & Young People Commission

Looked After Children – a cross cutting review for which evidence-gathering was conducted in one intensive week of interviews and meetings, and with a follow-up meeting to finalise the report and recommendations. These cover social work, fostering and residential placements, adoption, health, leaving & aftercare and education. Report available in CfPS library: <http://tiny.cc/uzda5>

Buckinghamshire County Council

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Maximising the Potential of Looked After Children – a review examining issues affecting educational attainment of looked after children in the county, including post-16 and their ability to participate in other aspects of school life. Recommendations focus on support at transition stages and support for foster carers to enable them to better support the children they look after. The report is available in the CfPS library: <http://tiny.cc/g1dt6>

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Children & Young People's Scrutiny Panel

Looked After Children & Young People – a review to examine whether all agencies in Sandwell were continuing to improve in relation to corporate parenting support. Young people from the Looked After Children Board acted as strategic advisers to the scrutiny review and closely informed the findings and recommendations. The report is available in the CfPS library: <http://tiny.cc/9yvno>

Cheshire West & Chester Council

Every Child Matters Select Panel

Our Children Matter – 39 steps to help bring some normality into their lives – a review which won the CfPS 2010 Good Scrutiny Award for Innovation due to the depth and extent of its active involvement of looked after young people in gathering evidence for the review. They spent days out at Go Ape and the zoo, and are now involved in other scrutiny reviews and activities influencing the council. The report is available in the CfPS library: <http://tiny.cc/fcoge> and a summary can be found in Successful Scrutiny 2010, available here: <http://tiny.cc/7xj56>



References and further information

Key Legislation

Children Act 1989

<http://tiny.cc/grzro>

Adoption and Children Act 2002

<http://tiny.cc/lf98m>

Children and Young Persons Act 2008

<http://tiny.cc/951i3>

Care planning, placements and case review regulations (England) 2010 and statutory guidance

These documents specify the current requirements for care plans, including health and education plans, placement decisions and monitoring, and case reviews. They consolidate previous regulations and guidance, providing a central source of reference for local authorities' work with looked after children and can be found on the old Every Child Matters website:

<http://tiny.cc/7xt9g>

The government has committed to publishing a revised set of slimmed down guidance relating to care-planning in March 2011. See the new Department for Education website for information on the policy reviews underway: <http://tiny.cc/7xt9g>

Welcome to Corporate Parenting – a Councillor Development Learning Resource

A booklet and audio CD produced by Kirklees, Bradford and Calderdale Councils working with a group of looked after young people.

Contact: Angie Aspinall, Councillor Development Officer, Kirklees Council, angie.aspinall@kirklees.gov.uk or 01484 416 930

Improving Educational Outcomes for Looked After Children and Young People, and Improving the Emotional and Behavioural Health of Looked After Children and Young People

2 useful Knowledge Reviews containing detailed evidence of what works, produced by the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children's Services (C4EO), September 2010, available on www.c4eo.org.uk

Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice, Developing an effective approach.

A useful guide for scoping a review on corporate parenting, by Hart, D and Williams, A (2008) National Children's Bureau www.ncb.org.uk

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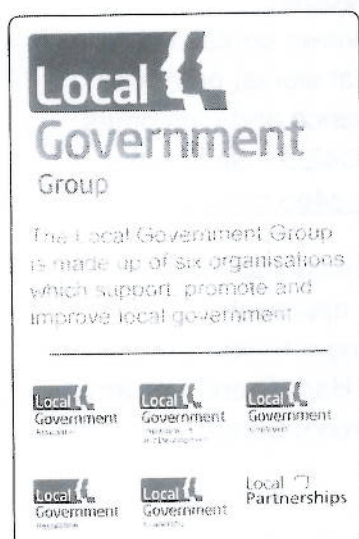
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APPENDIX C

**PRO-FORMA TO REQUEST FUNDING TO SUPPORT
CURRENT SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION**

Title of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:
Title of the current scrutiny investigation for which funding is requested:
To clearly identify the purpose for which additional support is required:
To outline indicative costs to be incurred as a result of the additional support:
To outline any associated timescale implications:
To outline the 'added value' that may be achieved by utilising the additional support as part of the undertaking of the Scrutiny Investigation:

To outline any requirements / processes to be adhered to in accordance with the Council's Financial Procedure Rules / Standing Orders:

To outline the possible disadvantages of not utilising the additional support during the undertaking of the Scrutiny Investigation:

To outline any possible alternative means of additional support outside of this proposal:

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

18 October 2011



Report of: Scrutiny Support Officer

Subject: INVESTIGATION INTO THE PROVISION OF
SUPPORT AND SERVICES TO LOOKED AFTER
CHILDREN - SETTING THE SCENE - COVERING
REPORT

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Members with an introduction to the 'Setting the Scene' report, which will be delivered at today's meeting by officers from the Child and Adults Department as part of this Forum's investigation into the 'Provision of Support and Services to Looked After Children / Young People'.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Officers from the Child and Adults Department, will be in attendance at today's meeting to present a report, as part of this Forum's investigation into the 'Provision of Support and Services to Looked After Children / Young People' in relation to the following issues:-
- (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.
- 2.2 The Member of Parliament for Hartlepool and the Authority's Portfolio Holder for Children's Services have been invited to this meeting (subject to availability) to provide evidence to the Forum in relation to their views on the provision of support and services available to looked after children / young people.
- 2.2 During this evidence gathering session, it is suggested that responses should be sought to the following key questions:-

- (a) What are your views on the provision of support and services that the Council provide for looked after children / young people?
- (b) Do you think that the Council could do more to fulfil their role as a corporate parent?
- (c) In light of the budgetary situation, how do you think support and services should be provided in the future to most effectively / efficiently meet the needs of looked after children / young people and promote improved outcomes?

3. RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 That Members note the content of the report and seek clarification on any relevant issues where felt appropriate.

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 paper was used in preparation of this report:-

- (a) Scrutiny Investigation into the 'Provision of Support and Services to Looked After Children - Scoping Report (Scrutiny Support Officer – 18.10.2011)

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

18 October 2011



Report of: Head of Business Unit (Specialist Services)

Subject: HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL'S PROVISION
SUPPORT AND SERVICES FOR LOOKED AFTER
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE – SETTING THE SCENE
REPORT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide information to set the scene for the beginning of the Forum's investigation into 'Hartlepool Borough Council's Provision for Looked After Children and Young People'.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Children's Services Scrutiny Forum selected 'Hartlepool Borough Council's Looked After Children Provision' as its main topic for investigation during the 2011/12 Municipal Year.
- 2.2 Based on the scope and remit for the investigation, outlined within this report is a range of information, the intention of which is to set the scene for the beginning of the Forum's investigations.

3. NATIONAL CONTEXT

- 3.1 Outcomes nationally for children and young people looked after are significantly poorer than those of peers who remain within their families. In 2009/10 only 26% of children looked after achieved 5 GCSE's at grades A* - C grades compared to 75% of their peers. Care leavers are an overrepresented population group in the context of homelessness, long term unemployment and those sentenced to custody. Around 60% of looked after children in England have been reported to have emotional and mental health problems, one third have contact with the criminal justice system and a high proportion experience poor health, education and social outcomes upon leaving care.

4. LEGAL CONTEXT AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

4.1 There is a range of legislation, statutory regulation and guidance governing the arrangements for children looked after designed to improve outcomes and 'narrow the gap' between the quality of life and outcomes for children in public care and those of their peers. This includes:

- Children Act 1989;
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000;
- Adoption and Children Act 2004;
- Children and Young Person's Act 2008;
- Care Matters 2007;
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010;
- IRO Handbook: Statutory Guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their Functions in relation to Case Management and Review for Looked After Children.

4.2 In addition to the over arching statutory framework contained within the above, the provision of placements and support services to Looked After Children and Young People are subject to the following:

- Fostering Regulations Guidance and National Minimum Standards 2011;
- Adoption Regulations Guidance and National Minimum Standards 2011;
- The Children's Homes Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2011;
- Promoting the quality of life for Looked After Children and Young People.- National Institute for Health and Clinic Excellence October 2010;
- Statutory Guidance on Promoting the Health and Well Being of Looked After Children.

4.3 Compliance with the Regulations and National Minimum Standards is monitored via an inspection framework undertaken by OFSTED, within this framework, each of the National Minimum Standards is mapped to one of the Every Child Matters outcomes and a judgement made on performance. Inspections of Children Homes are completed on an annual basis. Inspections for Fostering and Adoption Agency are undertaken on a three yearly basis.

5. THE PROFILE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LOOKED AFTER BY HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL.

5.1 Tables 1/1a details the numbers of children looked after by Hartlepool monthly since April 10. From April 2010 until June 2011 the numbers of looked after children and young people have remained fairly steady with monthly fluctuations. There was a rise in July and August 2011 which upon closer investigation was primarily due to large sibling groups becoming looked after.

Table 1

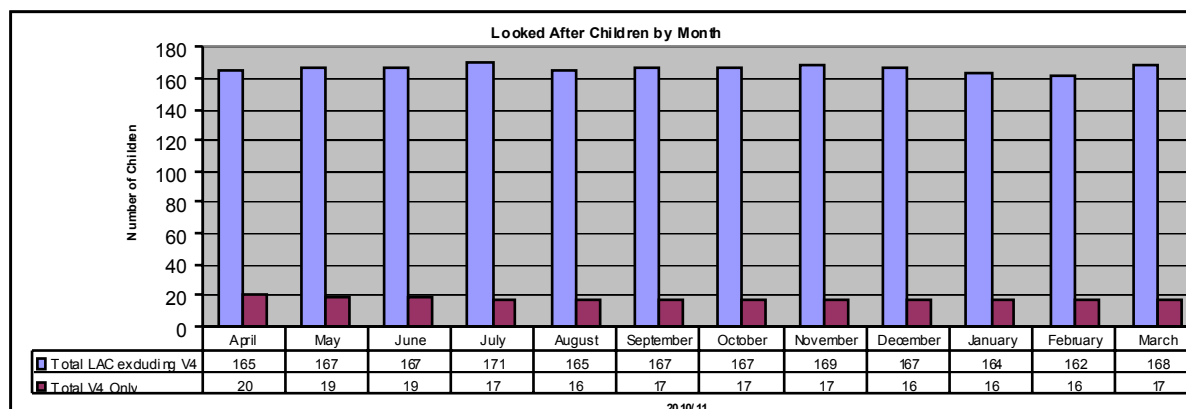
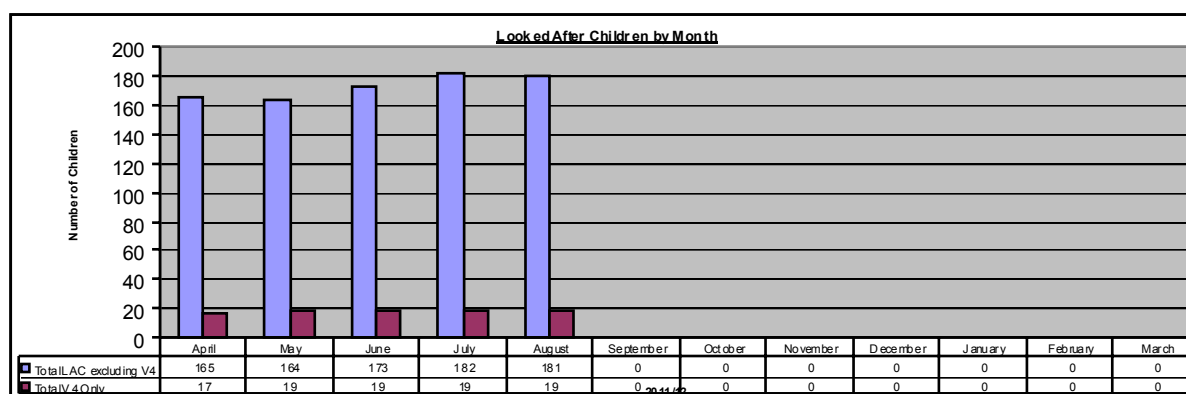


Table 1a.



5.2 Tables 2/ 2a details the age profile of Children and Young People Looked After. The largest age grouping is the 11 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

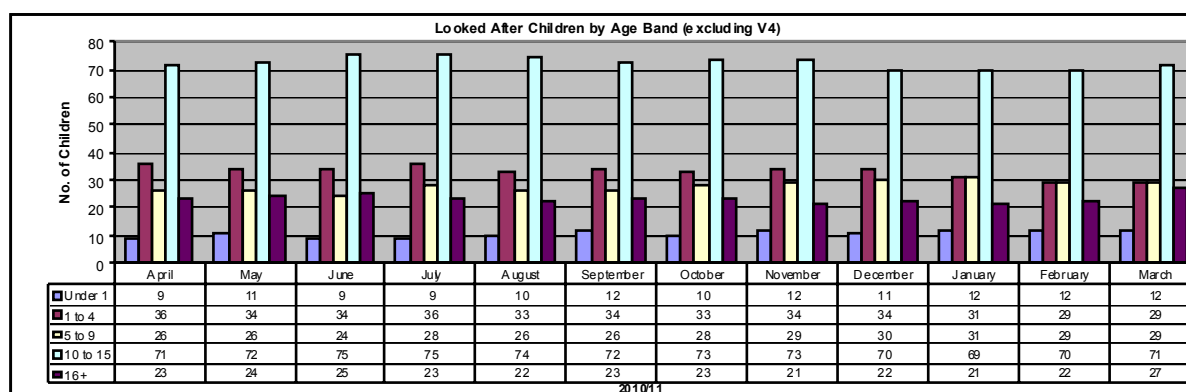
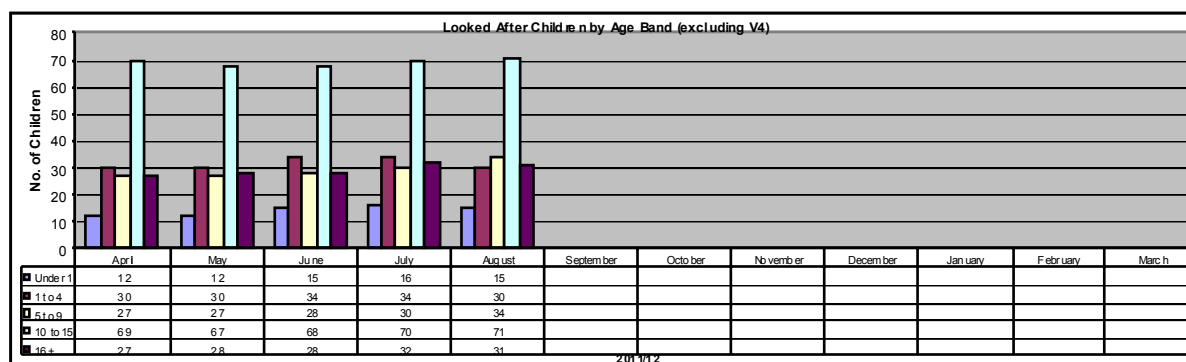


Table 2a



5.3 Tables 3/ 3a details the gender profile of Children and Young People Looked After.

Table 3

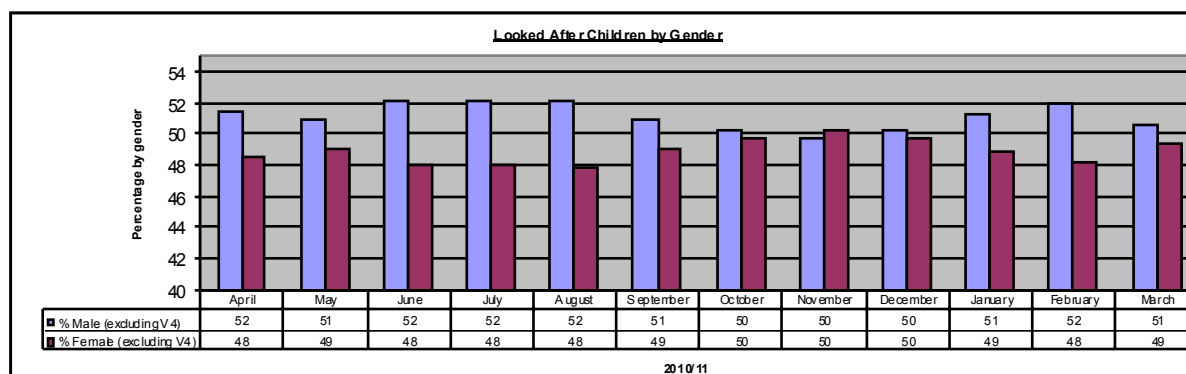
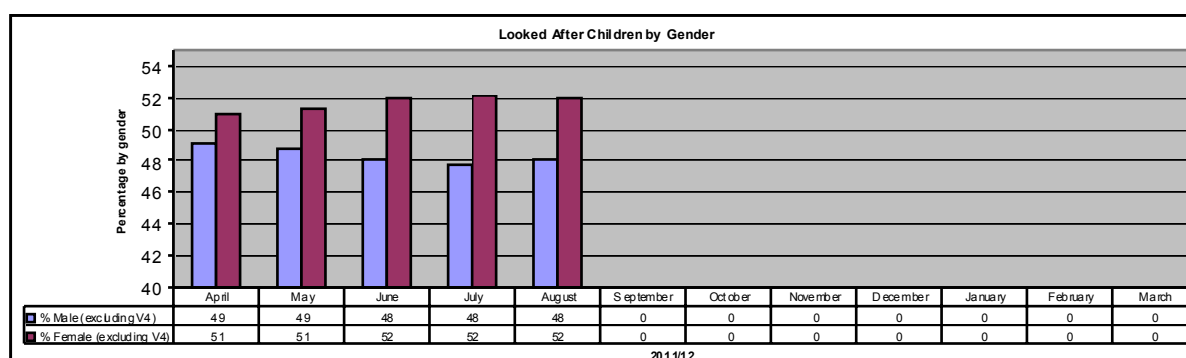


Table 3a



5.4 Tables 4/ 4a 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. 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. Our 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

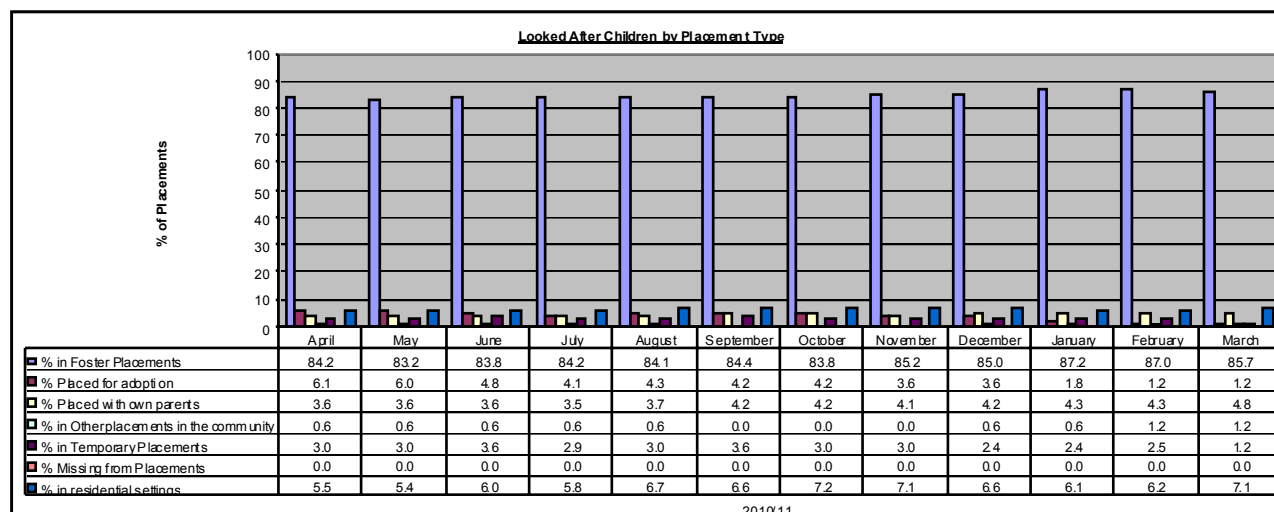
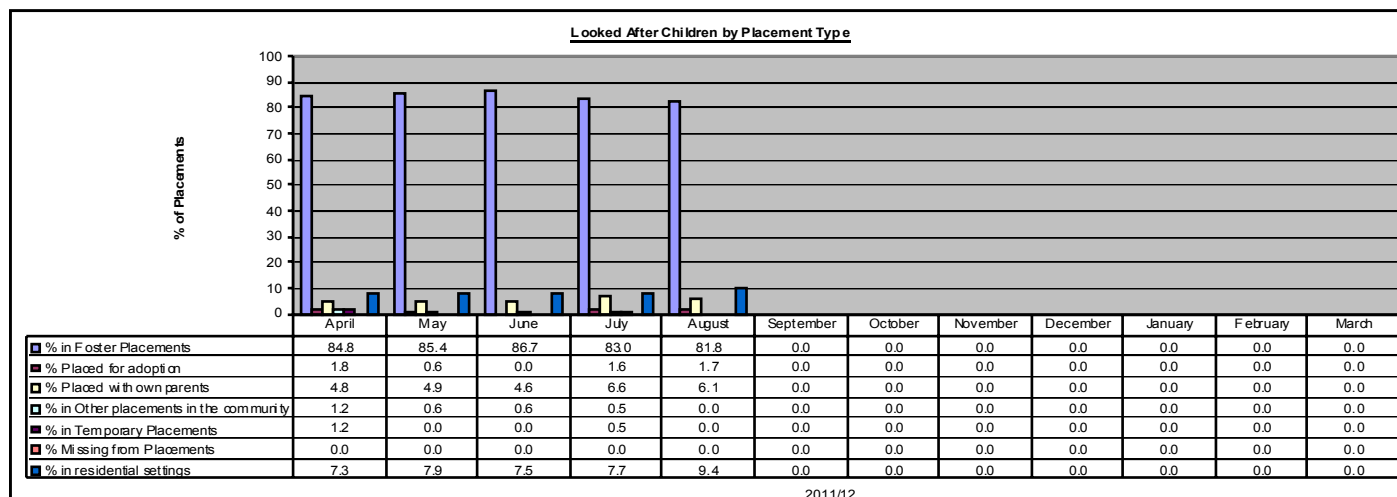


Table 4a



5.5 Tables 5/ 5a 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 council boundary which supports continuity of education, family relationships, health care, social networks and children and young people have a strong identity with the town. It

is for all of these reason that where we are able to meet children and young peoples needs we prioritise children and young people being placed locally.

Table 5

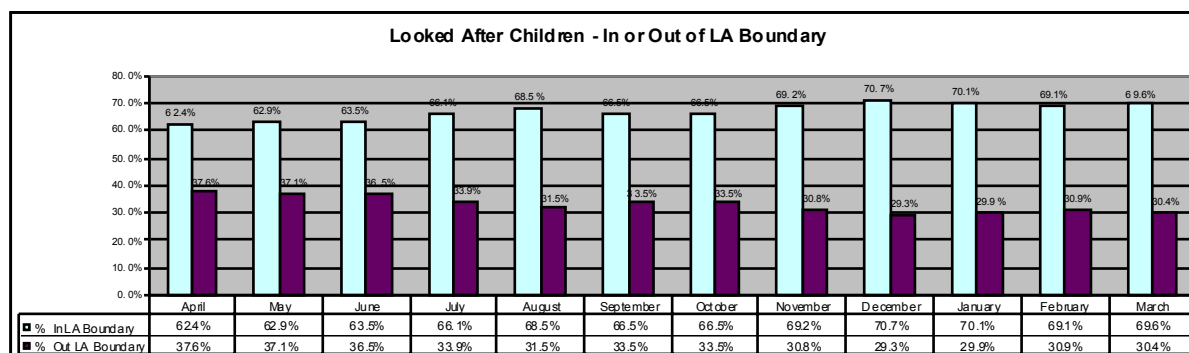
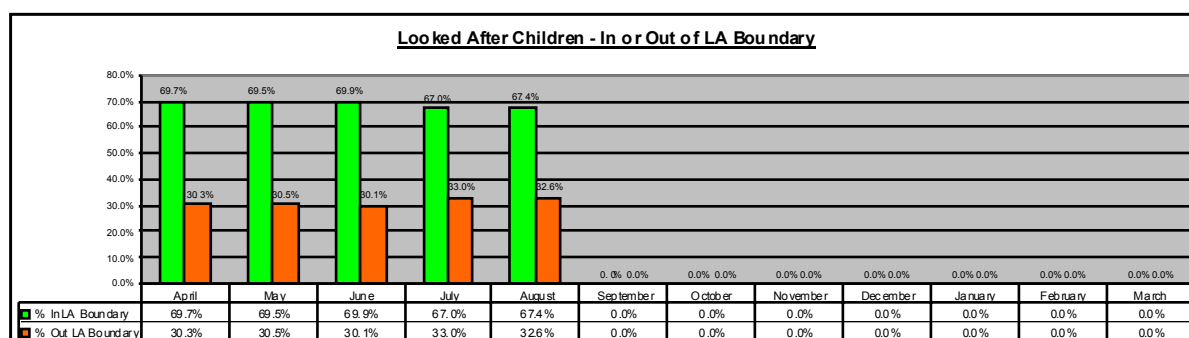


Table 5a



5.6 Tables 6/ 6a details the ethnicity of children and young people. 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

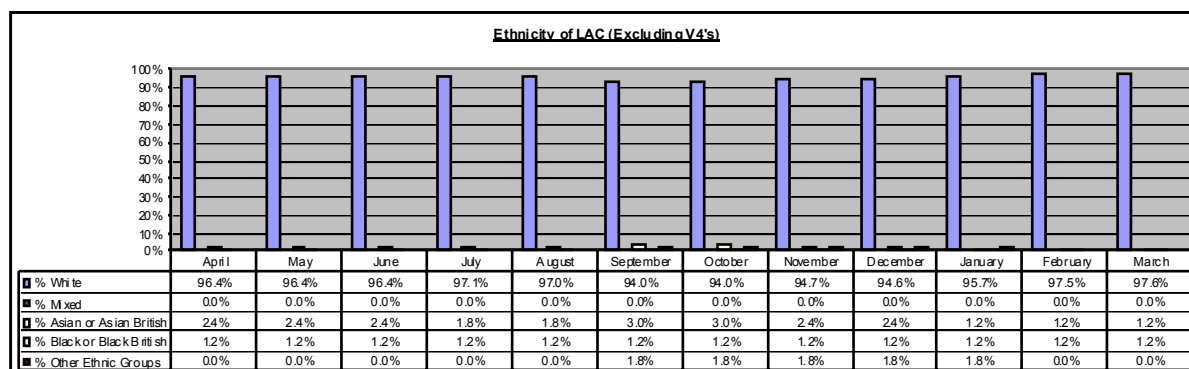
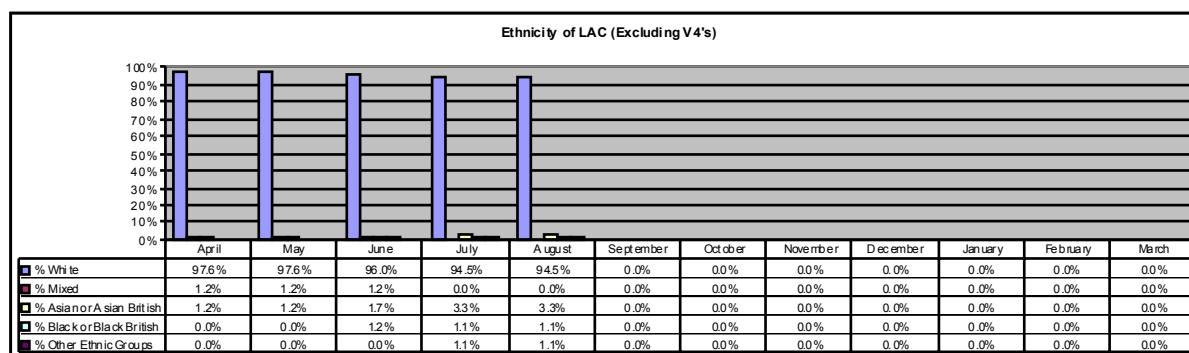


Table 6a



5.7 Tables 7/7a 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 2010/11 and the year to date is below the target and therefore is exceeding the target demonstrating good performance in this area.

Table 7

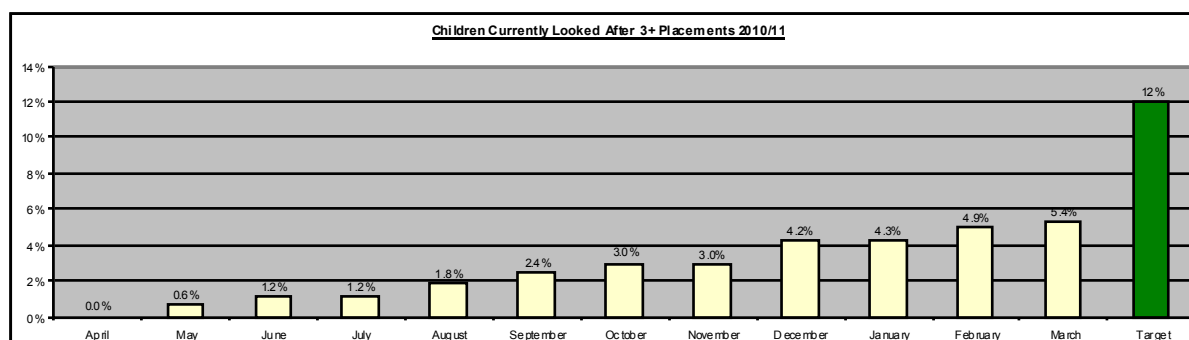
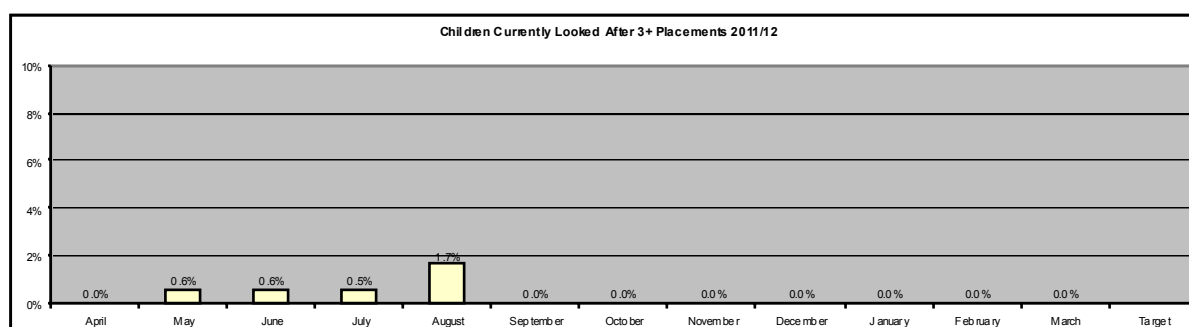


Table 7a



6. DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND SERVICE PROVIDED FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- 6.1 The statutory responsibilities to children and young people looked after are enshrined within the legislation as outlined in section 4. In order to meet these statutory responsibilities, Hartlepool has a dedicated Through Care Team which provides social work services to children for whom the long term plan is to remain looked after by the Authority. The team promotes positive parenting and provides consistency and stability particularly in relation the allocated social worker which supports the development of positive relationships in line with the Council's commitment to parenting as you would your own child.
- 6.2 For some children and young people their time looked after will be time limited resulting in them either returning home to the care of their parents or extended family members, being placed for adoption, or, for older young people a move into independent living. These children and young people will be provided with services from the Safeguarding, Assessment and Support Teams (SAS) which provide town wide services for children and young people in need including those in need of protection. Social workers within these teams are likely to have been working with the child and his/her family prior to them becoming looked after and will continue with their support until such times as they no longer require it.
- 6.3 Hartlepool Borough Council has a dedicated Looked After Nurse whose role is to ensure children and young people's health assessments are completed in line with statutory requirements and that services are offered to promote health and well being ensuring children's health needs are met. Hartlepool's Looked After Nurse is qualified nurse practitioner and able to prescribe medication, smoking cessation and about to embark on a sexual health course. The nurse is co-located with the Through Care Team and this has proven to be invaluable in facilitating access to direct health advice, support and intervention particularly for the older Looked After Young People and Care Leavers.
- 6.4 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. This service ensures children and young people have timely access to specialist CAMHS services ranging from mental health assessment and diagnosis, delivering therapeutic interventions and supporting the emotional health and well being of a child or young person. The service also provides a service to staff and carers through consultation, training and support.
- 6.5 It is the ethos of Hartlepool Borough Council that looked after children should have the same opportunities to develop and learn as other children and 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 and a dedicated looked after children's school inclusion coordinator whose role is to provide advice and support to teachers within schools, children and carers and track 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.

- 6.6 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.
- 6.7 The Care Placement and Planning Regulation 2011 place a requirement on local authorities to ensure, as far as it meets his/her needs, that a young person will not have a change of school during Key Stage 4, (Years 10 and 11) recognising the significance of this stage in a young person life in relation to GCSE achievement and future success. This is a care planning priority of the Council and great care is taken to ensure this requirement is met.
- 6.8 Hartlepool Borough Council's Integrated Youth Support Service has a named personal advisor attached to the Through Care team to ensure all young people preparing to leave school have access to good careers advice and have a post 16 destination, be that further education, training or employment. This support and advice continues until the young person is 21 years old should they need it.
- 6.9 Hartlepool Borough Council has signed up to a Department of Education initiative 'From Care2Work' and developed an action plan to ensure young people looked after and leaving care have access to and are supported in undertaking job opportunities. Within the service, developments are underway to create a Modern Apprentice post within the Through Care Team for a care leaver to promote children and young people's service development and further opportunities are being explored to provide training and work experience across the Council.
- 6.11 Hartlepool Borough Council is committed to ensuring children and young people in our care have opportunities to pursue their individual interests and hobbies. Within the Looked After Review process an Independent Reviewing Officer will ensure that children and young people are given every opportunity to pursue existing or new activities and hobbies.
- 6.12 The Council has provided opportunities for children and young people to take part in outdoor residential activities aimed at developing self confidence, self esteem and team building. It is essential that, as corporate parents, we encourage children and young people to pursue their interests and talents and receive support and guidance to pursue their goals and aspirations.

- 6.13 As children and young people looked after are a particularly vulnerable group, it is crucial that they feel safe and are kept safe by those with whom they come into contact. There is a robust regulatory framework aimed at ensuring strict vetting of all staff and service providers working with looked after children. This includes the adoption of safe recruitment and safe workforce principles in relation to employees and thorough training and assessment of foster carers and adopters scrutinised an independent Panel which makes a recommendation on suitability.
- 6.14 Hartlepool Borough Council has one children's residential unit providing short break care for children and young people with disabilities. A significant focus of the unit is the partnership with parents and carers and parents of children who access services at Exmoor Grove have recently established a 'Friends of Exmoor Grove' charity. Recently they have held a garden party to raise funds for the charity and it is envisaged the group will be involved in the future development of the service. Exmoor Grove is subject to an annual inspection undertaken by OFSTED and monthly visits under Regulation 33 of Children's Home Regulations 2001 from council officers who do not have direct line management responsibility for the provision. The purpose of these visits is to monitor and sign the homes records, to identify any patterns or issues requiring attention and take action to improve or adjust provisions where necessary.
- 6.15 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.
- 6.16 The service aim is to provide quality placement 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.
- 6.17 Placement stability is arguably the single most important factor influencing positive outcomes for children looked after and as such it is a priority focus 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 includes, 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 as a through group work and individual one to one support. The support team provide intensive wrap around support to placements in crisis.
- 6.18 As a fundamental part of being a good corporate parent, it is essential to engage with children and young people to ensure we are listening to their

views and involving them in the services we develop to support our parenting of them. With the support of a participation worker and in line with statutory requirements, Hartlepool Borough Council developed a Pledge to looked after children in 2009 and a Children in Care Council (CICC). The CICC has recently reviewed and updated the Pledge and has split the CICC so there is council for younger children (The Junior Council) and another for older looked after young people and care leavers. 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 the Council. Two members of the group attend the Corporate Parent Forum and a joint meeting between CICC and 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 we are able to learn from the experiences from young people to ensure we constantly strive to improve our services for them.

7. CORPORATE PARENTING

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 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.
- 7.3 Like most other authorities, Hartlepool has created a Corporate Parent Forum. It is a properly constituted Council meeting, chaired by the Lead Member for Children 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 CICC. 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 have grown 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 CICC 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.

- 7.4 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.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 That members consider the information provided in this provide as part of the evidence gathering session for this investigation and to inform future lines of enquiry.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- (a) Report of the Scrutiny Support officer entitled 'Scrutiny Investigation into the provision and support of services to Looked After Children/ Young People Scoping Report
- (b) House of Commons – Education Committee 'Looked-after Children; Further Government Response to the Third Report from the Children, Schools and Families Committee, Session 2008-2009' Fifth Special Report of Session 2010-11.
- (c) Children Act 1989 (Care, Placement, Planning Regulations 2010)
- (d) National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence – Report 'Promoting the quality of life of looked-after children and young people' October 2010
- (e) Hartlepool Borough Council Looked After Strategy