

**CABINET – 24 MAY 2011**  
**PROGRESS REPORT ON CHILDREN IN AND LEAVING CARE: TO**  
**NOTE PROGRESS AND ISSUES IN RELATION TO THE CHILDREN**  
**AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN COUNCIL'S CARE.**

**Report by Director for Children, Young People & Families**

**Introduction**

1. This report reviews the performance and outcomes of CLA (children looked after and care leavers) over the last six months, and of the Corporate Parenting Strategy, introduced in 2008 in partnership with its Children in Care Council (CICC). The report highlights areas where it has been successful and areas where amendments should be considered because of new challenges or where the approach needs to be reviewed. Attached to the report is a revised strategy.
2. Since the last cabinet report, OFSTED have inspected Children's Services with a major focus on CLA. The results of this inspection, along with an action plan, will be notified to cabinet as soon as they are confirmed.
3. An amended Placement Strategy (see annex1) has been introduced to address new duties outlined in the 2008 Children Act (amended 2010 and 2011), particularly the Sufficiency Duty under which Local Authorities are obliged to provide a range of placements that address the needs of CLA locally, where appropriate. To a certain extent, this has already been addressed through the previous (2007) Placement Strategy with its emphasis on local partnerships, more effective commissioning and a prevention and support approach, keeping CLA from escalating through the care trajectory to out of county placements. Aspects of this have been reported to cabinet through a series of reports, e.g. CLA progress reports, the Housing Strategy, Rt 2 Be Cared 4 and the Cross Regional Commissioning Strategy

**The Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy**

4. Our Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out the key priority actions required by partners across the Children's Trust, including our CICC, to tackle the critical issues that impact on children in care. These include: the need for stable and consistent care; the support necessary to minimise time spent in care; access to the best possible appropriate education and healthcare, and to ensure all children and young people (CYP) feel valued and listened to.
5. Our Corporate Parenting role currently (at end of February, 2011) extends to 418 CYP who are looked after, 25% of whom are from BaME. Of these, 245 are males and 173 females, 156 are aged 0 – 9, 151 aged 10 – 15 and 111 are aged 16+. These numbers are very volatile and there is some indication that the total may be increasing. There are also 315 care leavers, including 157 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs). The

strategy also includes children on the edge of care and those who have left care for permanent placements, e.g .adoption.

6. Staff across the Council and Children's Trust, including Health and Police, continue to be made aware of CLAs' needs and of Corporate Parenting. The key message at all events is *looked after children are everyone's business* and all participants are challenged to consider their professional and community role in supporting CLA as if they were their own child.
7. Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel have visited Thornbury on a regular basis (Regulation 33 visits) and have taken a very active and helpful interest in the construction of the new home, which is due for completion in April 2011. Visits to Maltfield have not been as frequent and action to address this has been agreed. Although written accounts are sometimes sparse, there are usually clear action points arising from these visits, which are discussed at Corporate Parenting Panel, a clear example being the provision of the new Thornbury.
8. Councillors, Officers and partner agencies have recently met adopters to review progress in this area and plan for future provision.

### **Review (Grouped Under Strategy Objectives)**

#### **All professionals, statutory services and the voluntary and private sectors to work in effective partnership.**

9. The newly commissioned housing provision has shown a reduction in evictions, an improvement in Education, Employment and Training (EET) and 150% increase in numbers of 16/17 yr olds in supported housing (as opposed to B&B). Further units have been commissioned to cope with increased demand after the Southwark Judgement, which made 16/17 year old homeless people our responsibility. The Strategy has led to a reduction from over 3,000 bed nights in B&B in 08-09 to 622 in 2010-11.
10. The Cross Regional Commissioning projects to provide additional residential placements for children with complex needs has started taking referrals and will eventually deliver for us up to 9 residential and educational placements at a saving of between £500-£1300/ week, 6 by 2012. The same model is being used to commission Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements and will be extended to all residential placements over the next five years.
11. A new agreed plan with Health has resulted in the numbers having their health needs assessed rising from 85% to 94.6% in 2010 against a Statistical Neighbours (SNs) figure of 85.6; dental checks remained at 86% and immunisations held at 84% (compared with an average of 47% coming into care having had them). 6.52% of CLA were assessed as having a substance misuse problem in 2010 compared with 10.5% in 08/09 and of those, 78%, compared with 52.3%, accepted an intervention. Additionally, in conjunction with Community Health and Children's Centres, OCC is delivering training to Leaving Care workers and partners to enable the award winning work on Mother and Baby groups for care-leavers to develop further. OCC and Health have improved the joint funding of placements for CYP with complex needs.

12. The OCC Employability Programme has been set up by the Lead Member as a direct response to CYP and won the National Care Advisory Service Quality Mark, a national award, in Jan 2011. To date, 26 young people have benefited from this in the last 18 months.
13. Changes in partnership working with adult services have improved transitions for those with learning difficulties. The setting up of the vulnerable adults' panel along with the mental health review and new mental health housing strategy is designed to improve service delivery for those vulnerable adults, including care leavers, who formerly have not met the criteria for adult services and/or are too chaotic to engage.

**Challenges**

14. There are still significant challenges in providing sustainable supported housing for a small cohort of young people with chaotic behaviour, often resulting in them being placed in unsuitable B&B or nightly charge accommodation.
15. There is more work needed to smooth the transition to adult services due to different assessment criteria.
16. Closer tracking of dental services is necessary.

**Attaining best possible outcomes for CLA**

17. The Virtual School, in conjunction with RAISE (the Leaving Care Education team), has contributed to improved long term achievements in educational attainment.
18. Achievement at Key Stage 2 was difficult to measure in 09/10 because of the partial boycott of SATs. A combination of SATs results and teacher assessment placed 46.2% gaining level 4 in English, 30.8% in Maths and 63% in Science, an improvement on the previous year in Maths and Science.
19. At Key Stage 4, those obtaining 5A\*-Gs rose from 52% to 55%. Roughly a quarter who were not level 2 qualified on finishing Key Stage 4 in 2006 were level 2 or above by the end of their third year following year 11 (19 at September 2010). In addition, progression to a positive destination following year 11, at the 30th of September 2010 (result for 2011), was at 88% up from 75% the previous year. This was achieved by improving the way young people were individually targeted and supported through an intensive multi-agency approach.
20. It is expected that 17% of our post-18s will go on to Higher Education in September. Most of those who enter Higher Education do so at a later age than their non-looked after peers and rightly have support up to age 25.

**Challenges**

21. Improving educational attainment as measured in years 6 and 11 continues to be a priority, in order to address the disadvantages between CLA and their peers, and, whilst evidence from tracking CYP through the system suggests more of them are catching up, performance is still behind national and SNs and suggests the need for a review of our approach.

22. Despite similar evidence of “catch-up” at later stages and a slightly older group coming into care, Key Stage 4 results remain a concern with only 6.4% getting 5A\* - Cs with English and Maths .
23. Although there has been significant improvement in numbers of CYP with up to date PEPs, the standard of these is variable and needs to be more consistent.
24. The Department also measures EET across the whole cohort of those who qualify for services (i.e. those post statutory school age). At 10th December 2010, the figure was 62%, a drop from 68% the previous December, reversing the previous trend. The drop is partially due to the New Asylum Model for UASCs and the inclusion of homeless 16/17 year olds following Southwark, both of which are now responding to intensive support, which needs to be sustained. However, the current economic climate is a challenging environment in which to increase EET numbers although, whilst this was down on last year, it remains a relatively high score and is well above SNs and towards the top of national achievement.

#### **Ensuring stable relationships**

25. Between 90 and 97% have their reviews on time (SNs = 87.7% for 09/10).
26. CYP exiting to permanent placements is up from 36 in 09/10 to 48 (22 adoptions, 23 SGOs and 3 to Residence Orders). In addition, 3 were made subject to Residence Orders and a further 16 supported in Kinship placements outside of the care system, making a total of 67.
27. A variety of evidence-based practice support services - e.g Multi Treatment Foster Care (MTFC), Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT) and Fostering Attachments, Brief Solution Therapy etc - have all contributed to improvements in stability
28. Long term stability is projected to rise again from 74.8 to 79% (SE average for 09/10 = 70%).
29. Placed for adoption within a year of the decision to adopt is projected to rise slightly to 88% at year end (SNs = 73.3%)
30. 99% of care leavers are in contact with the service with the numbers in suitable housing remaining from 92% to 96%.

#### **Challenges**

31. Whilst the end of years figures are still being confirmed the numbers of children with three or more moves in a year is projected to have risen from last year with a large number of children moving placements during March ( 11.5 cf SNs of 10.7). Work to redress this is underway.
32. **All** CLA need to have quality reviews on time.
33. The rising numbers of CYP exiting to permanent placements, whether or not these placements are in the care system, all need robust support systems including in most cases regular financial support.
33. The MTFC in full programme has now been mainstreamed and extended to include adolescents. Resources are now being targeted at recruiting and supporting sufficient carers.

**Listening to CLA**

- 34. CICC has continued in active engagement in local, regional and national events. They are currently involved in helping us develop our guidance for the implementation of the new Children’s Act and have recently confirmed the continued relevance of the Council’s pledge to them.
- 35. 97% of CLA participated in their reviews.

**Challenges**

- 36. CICC is seeking a review of opportunities to engage in activities with each other and is considering ways of reaching out to those who do not attend
- 37. We also need to find other ways to ensure the small minority of CYP who do not participate in reviews are engaged.

**Valuing and celebrating the uniqueness of each CLA**

- 38. The Directorate has a contract through care planning that all children should have the right to participate in at least one activity of their choice per week.
- 39. Over 400 CYP and their carers participated in a variety of activities last year, designed to support placements, raise self esteem and prevent offending. Activities included foster and adoption picnics, arts weekends, holidays and a conference. Although the service has not been able to provide residential events at Hillend this year, other popular activities have been and will be maintained through fundraising by the Oxfordshire Foster Care Association, the CYP themselves and a donation by the Schools Forum.

*Obtaining best value*

- 40. Using the full range of Family Placement Support Services to ensure stability is considerably less expensive than having to respond when the placement disrupts, a prime factor in CYP escalating along the care trajectory to the most expensive options. Targeted family support delivered in a range of multi-agency activities has reduced our rising numbers of CLA, which peaked during the summer at 460, but have now fallen. Oxfordshire has a relatively low number of CLA (30.4 /10,000) compared with its SNs (37/10,000).
- 41. Latest (2010/11) net costs for CLA per capita of population are 21% lower than our benchmarking group and 49% lower than the English average (figures from CIPFA benchmarking). This is because of the excellent preventative services (see attached strategy).
- 42. We provide very good value for money in our placements with a weekly unit cost (gross) of **£ 749 compared to average of £894**. Our costs have also gone down in the last year from £837. (Figures from CIPFA Benchmarking)
- 43. The percentage in residential care is 12.8% against 15.8% for SNs. The average cost of a residential placement is about £3,500 per week as opposed to, for example, in-house fostering at £362.
- 44. The successful pilot of Multi-Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) has led to improved outcomes for children with particularly disturbing histories, been recognised nationally for the effectiveness of our implementation, improved outcomes for the children and saved placement costs. The Council has taken the decision to extend the funding for MTFC to provide placements for adolescents since this had a demonstrable impact on educational outcomes

with children catching up 17 IQ points in 6 months and in-year savings on placements for children estimated at £340,160 (see Placement Strategy)

45. By investing staff time to work intensively with them and their families, there are lower numbers of CYP seeking accommodation services under the Southwark Judgement. At the same time, the fact that Oxfordshire has preserved its supported housing and invested in FGCs, has meant that families have been able to facilitate solutions for themselves, thereby mitigating the 20% reduction in the Supporting People grant (£526,152)
46. A successful new recruitment strategy has increased numbers of in-house foster carers with additional efforts being directed to the recruitment of short break carers and BaME carers.
47. The Community Parenting Programme in partnership with the Elmore Team, which uses Parents Under Pressure, an evidence based method of assessing capacity to change, continues to be piloted to provide support in the community for parents at risk of losing their children.

### **Challenges**

48. The financial climate makes further streamlining of support services crucial. Oxfordshire is well-placed to address this because it has already adopted a strategy on commissioning to achieve better value for money, has relatively low numbers in agency placements and a relatively high proportion of CLA in in-house foster care.
49. Services to UASCs who have exhausted all their rights to services have had to be re-established following a recent court ruling.

### **Conclusions**

50. The Corporate Parenting Strategy has proved effective at helping our CLA and achieving best value, and is endorsed by them through the CICC and other forums, such as the Sounding Boards and the Virtual School Governing Body etc. Clearly, Education and Stability remain our priorities and continue to present challenges
51. New challenges are coming from or expected to come from capacity issues surrounding the implementation of the new Care Planning regulations and particularly the new IRO roles; the need to deliver increased services to care leavers; independently chaired reviews of relevant CYP; foster carers' annual reviews, and the Sufficiency Strategy (a legal requirement to provide stable local placements based on timely and effective care plans). Additionally, the continuing need for Cost Savings (particularly regarding Leisure and Cultural Activities for our CYP); the need for CYP to remain in care for longer and the increase in complex needs of those entering care later as a result of the Southwark Judgement all add to these pressures.
52. Working in closer partnerships with all agencies, voluntary and statutory, to support our CLA is the best way to ensure that the most effective services are delivered at the earliest point to prevent escalation. To do this, we need to:
  - Build our knowledge of the vulnerable individuals and groups within our care population so that we continue to focus performance management and resources at children and young people's identified and assessed need



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- Review and invest in what we have learned really works and brings about significant positive results
- Respond to the financial constraints on local government by continuing to ensure value for money and obtaining better outcomes are linked with appropriate management of risk.
- Continue to involve CLA the review and design of services so that our approaches to the work and the pattern of provision is robust and flexible to meet future challenges
- Continue to work on achieving placement sufficiency through recruitment and retention of foster carers.

### **Financial and Staff Implications**

53. There are no new financial assessments arising from this report. The report contains examples of how we have delivered both cashable savings or avoided costs and achieved better value in our commissioning of placements for CLA, which also ensures they are closer to the communities they come from. It is currently forecast that services for children in and leaving the authority's care will spend in line with the approved budget for 2010-12.

### **Recommendations**

54. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:**

**(a) continue to support the Corporate Parenting Strategy and to work to the current objectives of the strategy;**

**(b) endorse the amended Placement Strategy**

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