

CABINET – 20 APRIL 2010

THE COUNCIL'S ROLE AS CORPORATE PARENT TO ITS LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN: ISSUES AND PROGRESS

Report by Joint Acting Head of Children's Social Care

Introduction

1. This report updates Cabinet on performance and outcomes for Children Looked After, including Care Leavers (CLA), and on the continued implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy adopted by Cabinet in May 08.

The Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy

2. The Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out the key priority actions required to tackle the critical issues that impact on children in care: these include the need for stable and consistent care and access to the best possible appropriate education and health care.
3. The Children in Care Council (CIC) has worked extensively with members, officers, carers, other agencies and CLA to ensure services are developed and monitored with children and young people's voices at the centre. Highlights over the last year include helping in the re-commissioning of supported housing and residential provision, and the development of a new financial policy for care leavers. They are to host their own conference for CLA in June this year with the new Director, amongst others, as a guest speaker.
4. Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel visit the children's homes, Thornbury House and Maltfield, on a regular basis in order that they can satisfy themselves that the care provided is "good enough for my child". In addition, they are overseeing the rebuild of Thornbury House, due to start in April.
5. Projects which have arisen from various initiatives to raise the awareness of corporate parenting within the Council and the Children's Trust have led to, for example,
 - ICT reconditioning computers from the Better Offices Programme for CLA and care leavers
 - The establishment of a Virtual School to support intensive catch up help to CLA
 - In partnership with the MKOB change programme, an integrated service for "Pathways to Work" is being established within the Council, which will support the whole Council along with the Children's Trust, in its work to extend in-house work experience and apprenticeships for older care leavers and other vulnerable groups

- Building on the partnership which led to our award as a regional centre of excellence, joint commissioning of supported housing for young people in conjunction with Supporting People and the Districts has taken place. This project is on course to deliver the same quantity of housing at an improved quality whilst absorbing a 20% reduction in funding.
- Successful completion of the Oxfordshire-led joint commissioning of agency placements for children with complex needs with six other LAs (endorsed and sponsored by ADCS, the National Children's Bureau and SEIP). This project will deliver up to nine residential beds for Oxfordshire at a saving of between £500 and £1300/ bed /week over the next five years.
- The successful pilot of Multi-Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) has led to improved outcomes to children with particularly disturbing histories, been recognised nationally for the effectiveness of our implementation, improved outcomes for the children and saved placement costs
- In conjunction with Community Health and Children's Centres, won a South East Central award for partnership for a Mother and Baby group for care-leavers.

Performance and Outcomes for Children and Young People in Care

6. The Corporate Parenting role currently extends to 778 children and young people, 442 in care, and 336 care leavers. 182 of the total are unaccompanied young people seeking asylum.
7. Annex 1 sets out the key performance and outcomes information relating to this group of children and young people. Significant improvements and/or sustained areas of progress include:
 - Improvements at key stage 4
 - Reduction in multiple placements
 - Improvements maintained in placement stability
 - The numbers leaving the care system for adoption and other permanent placements
 - Increase in age for CLA aged 16+ leaving care
 - Young people's participation in all aspects of the service and their involvement in regional and national events
 - Impact of the financial policy for care leavers, linking weekly income directly to purposeful employment
 - Numbers in Education, Employment and Training (EET) at 19 within 3% of their peers in April 09 and projected to improve this year
 - Numbers going to university rising to 9% (plus 1% graduated)
 - Allocation of all CLA cases to qualified social workers
 - Reduction in numbers of care leavers living in unsuitable housing
 - Increase in numbers having completed health and dental assessments
 - Good inspection outcomes for our children's homes and adoptions services
 - A 57% increase in the recruitment of foster carers.

- Impact of foster care programmes, three of which are part of government pilots under the CA2008, and the other Fostering solutions have all had demonstrable outcomes in changing children and young people's behaviours and strengthening carers ability to care with the three government programmes demonstrating additional savings in care costs
- Reduction in U18 LAC/Leaving Care becoming teenage parents

8. Key challenges in future include:

- The corollary of improved EET means that young people are pushing to stay in care post 18 and requiring support through university, with accompanying financial pressures. In addition to these groups, those staying on at college post 19/20 become reliant on the Council since they are not eligible to claim benefits.
- The impact of national concerns around child protection has led to a 30% rise in the number of care proceedings since 2005 and, in the first nine months of the year, a 20% rise in local new entrants (non UASCs) to the looked after system, which has put substantial pressure on placements and staffing: for example: the need to supervise substantial contact arrangements between parents and their children and the difficulty of finding placements anywhere in the country. In addition to these, there has been an increase in the court ordered demand for residential parenting assessments which are now the full financial responsibility of the Council (up from c£100,000 to over £600,000 this year) and a substantial need for welfare secure for self harming adolescent girls. Securing enough local places for CLA by 2011 is a statutory requirement under the new Children Act.
- An increasing set of responsibilities has been placed on local authorities under the 2008 Children Act, now subject to a lengthy consultation and implementation process. These include designated teachers in schools, increased responsibilities towards those leaving care and new standards for children's homes, adoption and fostering. Case law has also increased the Council's responsibilities, e.g. towards young homeless people in the Southwark judgement and more recently in relation to age assessments for unaccompanied asylum seekers. Supplementary estimates for both of these have been approved by Cabinet during 2009/10.
- Overall, Oxfordshire's care population is more troubled as measured by SDQ (strengths and difficulty questionnaires) and the numbers with statements (SEN), which has contributed to the deterioration in school attendance of CLA, since there has been a problem accessing education in a timely fashion and an associated problem in raising the attainment levels of CLA and care leavers.
- Oxfordshire has a significant number of other LA's adopted children living here who have significant specialised support needs and services are being restructured and enhanced to meet their needs

Future Service Developments

9. A range of further service improvements is being developed to support better outcomes:

- Whilst some progress has been made in ensuring sufficient local foster carers are recruited and supported, this remains a challenge. The lessons from the Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) pilot suggest that, with the offer of good out of hours support and remuneration that will allow carers to give up work, it is likely we can increase the pool of carers further.
 - Full implementation and dissemination of lessons learnt from the four pilot projects awarded to the council as part of the implementation of the new Children Act, e.g. RT 2 Be cared 4, mainstreaming the successful MTFC pilots and extending them into those aged 15+ by using the infrastructure to support carers
 - Implementation of a community based assessment and intervention programme for parents and babies in conjunction with the Elmore and Oxfordshire and Bucks Mental Health Trust (OBMH) designed to decrease the need for residential assessments and increase the long term community support networks for these most vulnerable families.
 - Building on the achievements of the Family and Placement Support Services (reduced numbers in care which are still lower than statistical neighbours) to create more intensive packages of support to reduce the need for adolescent placements.
 - Review and development of a new model of delivering health services to CLA and Care leavers that will allow a more differentiated service with greater integration of services with more time and specialist services targeting those with complex needs. This will also co locate the service with support services and help to deliver holistic assessments in a more integrated way.
 - Development of complex case management scrutiny to support front line workers in the Children's Trust.
 - Developing both the Virtual school and Raise services target tuition and catch up services to increase access to education and the numbers with level 2 and 3 literacy and numeracy.
 - Extending and finalising the procurement of housing to take account of increased needs arising from the Southwark judgement.
10. Progress on these developments and outcomes particularly focusing on an updated Placement Strategy will be reported to the June Cabinet.

Financial and Staff Implications

11. The factors identified in the challenges section of this paper will inevitably place financial pressures on Oxfordshire's Corporate Parenting strategy and these will be addressed in the new Placement strategy. Nevertheless the severity of most of these challenges is unpredictable.
12. Whilst still below statistical neighbours, the numbers of CLA/10,000 continue to rise with Oxfordshire's placement budget under pressure. Recently published information from CIPFA reports the average unit cost for looking after a child or young person in care in Oxfordshire in 2009/10 is £891/week against a statistical average of £940/week for our statistical neighbours (these figures are not compared against an exact match for SNS) but still indicate that Oxfordshire is delivering cost effective services.. These figures should

also be viewed in the context of a low number of CLA and a lower per capita expenditure than our statistical neighbours and nationally. This is even more significant when taking into consideration our very low use of residential agency special schools.

13. Oxfordshire is one of a group of ten authorities who continue to lobby the Government to recover the costs in full of providing good care and support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people and has made partial progress in this.

RECOMMENDATIONS

14. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:**
 - (a) **continue to support the Corporate Parenting Strategy;**
 - (b) **note the information on outcomes for our Looked After Children, and the service performance measures; and**
 - (c) **take note that a revised placement strategy is expected to return to Cabinet in June 2010**

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Background papers: Annex 1: Essential Information on Children Looked after
and Care Leavers

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ANNEX 1

Essential Information on the “Corporate Children” of the County Council 2010

Looked after children at 31st January 2010

How many children are looked after by your council, whether on a care order or through voluntary arrangements?

What is their ethnic and cultural background?

Children Looked After	F	M	Tot	
Total Number LA	181	260	441	
Under 1	13	11	24	5.4%
Aged 1-4	35	31	66	15.0%
Aged 5-9	27	32	59	13.4%
Aged 10-15 (indigenous)	61	88	149	33.8%
Aged 10-15 (UASCs)	0	20	20	4.5%
Aged 16+ (indigenous)	44	53	97	22.0%
Aged 16+ (UASCs)	1	25	26	5.9%

Legal Status				
C1 - Interim Care Order	56	38	94	21.3%
C2 - Full Care Order	55	82	137	31.1%
D1 - Freeing Order Granted	0	0	0	0.0%
E1 - Placement Order Granted	13	12	25	5.7%
J1 – On remand, or committed for trial or sentence, and accommodated by LA	0	1	1	0.2%
L2 – Emergency Protection Order	0	1	1	0.2%
V2 - Voluntary Accommodated Under Section 20	57	125	182	41.3%
W1 – Ward of Court	0	1	1	0.2%

Ethnicity				
Any Other Ethnic Group	1	2	3	0.7%
Any Other Ethnic Group - Chinese	2	0	2	0.5%
Asian Or Asian British - Any Other Asian Background	0	35	35	7.9%
Asian Or Asian British - Indian	0	1	1	0.2%
Asian Or Asian British - Pakistani	0	0	0	0.0%
Black Or Black British - African	5	11	16	3.6%
Black Or Black British - Any Other Black Background	2	1	3	0.7%
Black Or Black British - Caribbean	2	2	4	0.9%
Mixed - Any Other Mixed Background	5	7	12	2.7%
Mixed - White And Asian	0	4	4	0.9%
Mixed - White And Black African	0	2	2	0.5%

Mixed - White And Black Caribbean	15	10	25	5.7%
White - Any Other Background	2	9	11	2.5%
White – British	145	169	314	71.2%
White – Irish	2	3	5	1.1%
Not Stated – Refused	0	1	1	0.2%
Not Recorded	0	3	3	0.7%

What type of placement are they in – foster care, residential homes or secure units?

Foster care agency	25	44	69	15.6%
Foster Care	73	104	177	40.1%
Friends/Family	28	42	70	15.9%
TOTAL IN FOSTER CARE	126	190	316	71.7%
Placed for adoption	10	11	21	4.8%
Independent living	11	15	26	5.9%
Placed with parents	16	9	25	5.7%
Residential/School	16	35	51	11.6%
Secure Unit/YOI	2	0	2	0.5%
TOTAL	181	260	441	

Do all of your looked after children have an allocated social worker?

- 100%: this figure varies slightly with managers sometimes holding cases that are very complex or where they have a long-standing relationship with the child

How many placement moves have children had?

- At 31/12/09, 8.3% had moved 3 times (top performance rating – significant improvement over the last two years)
- At 31/12/09, 69.0% of young people who have been looked after for 2 ½ years have been in the same placement for 2 years (2% improvement from last year)
- At 31/12/09, 9.5% have been made subject to an Special Guardianship Order or an Adoption Order (slight decrease from last year but still above national and local comparisons and likely to go up before year end)
- For the period 01/04/2009 – 31/12/09 there has been a 37% increase in the number of indigenous children becoming looked after. At the end of December this was 32.7/10,000 which is still below statistical neighbours for 08/09. UASC make up 10.5% of population)

How many attend school regularly and how many are excluded from schools?

- 18.75% missed more than 25 days. This represents a significant deterioration on previous years and changes have been made to the Virtual School and the Access and Inclusion service to address the issues of providing appropriate services to a more challenging group of CYP

What progress are they making and what are their test scores and examination results?

- The Council has established a Virtual School to focus on improving the results of statutory school aged children. Key stage 4 results at 1A-G and 5A-Cs improved last year with 69% gaining 1A* - G and 8.3% gaining 5A*-Cs in English and Maths.
- After an improvement in Key stage 2 results last year they have dropped again this year with 21.4% achieving level 4 in English and 14.3% achieving level 4 in maths. Comparisons with SNS are not available.

How many children run away or otherwise go missing overnight from residential care and foster care?

- Since April 2009 37 children and young people have gone missing overnight with 22 of these from residential care, with 9 of these going missing 3 or more times.
- There is a complete list kept of all missing children in the County kept by the Police and a multi-agency group which meets monthly to ensure that appropriate strategies are in place to safeguard these children and young people.

How many children have a statement of special educational needs?

- The number of children with a Statement has dropped from 40.3% to 38.3, although this rises very significantly with those in Key stage 4, reflecting the increased difficulties with older CYP. This is endorsed by the returns on a new indicator, an internationally accredited measure, Strengths and Difficulties, (SDQ), which counts the emotional and behavioural difficulties of our care population. This again is higher than SNs.

How many children are involved in offending behaviour?

- The proportion of children offending in care is rising although still below our SNs. The reasons for this are partly explained by the increasing time young people are in care and the rise in the number entering into care post 16 as a result of the Southwark judgement.

Care leavers

How many young people eligible for Leaving Care services are the Council responsible for?

Progress in this group indicates that despite some very difficult starts the young people for whom we are responsible continue to make progress.

- There are 429 young people eligible for care leaving service
 - 114 Eligible (E= those still in care or on a care order - 91 plus 23 UASCs), representing a 33% rise in the number of indigenous CYP in care post 16
 - 51 Relevant (R = those 16 and 17yr olds who have left care post 16 - includes 29 UASCs)
 - 251 Former relevant (FR= those 18+ eligible for care leaving services - 107 are UASCs).
 - 13 section 24 (those eligible for partial services, eg in supporting EET)

Where do they live at the ages of 16, 17 and 18 plus?

- 95% of those in contact are living in accommodation judged to be suitable.

- 96% Eligible
- 98% Relevant
- 96% Former Relevant
- 90% of those at 19

Significant progress has been made through the Joint Housing Team. In conjunction with Supporting People and the District Councils the Council has just completed a re-commissioning exercise of all supported housing for vulnerable young people leading to an increased quality of supported accommodation, a preservation of the quantity whilst absorbing a 20% reduction in the grant from Supporting People. The exercise has also led to a redesign of the Pathways to ensure CYP are able to access the appropriate level of support.

How many young people who left care after the age of 16 are still in touch with their social worker, carer or other approved person?

- 94% of the overall cohort are in contact with the service. This figure includes all those who have been deported under Asylum regulations
- 98% of those aged 19 are still in contact

What sort of progress do young people make after they leave care?

- 76.9% of those aged 19 were in Education, Employment or Training (EET). This improvement in performance means that we have narrowed the gap to within 3% of their peers. This figure is projected to rise to 84% in April representing a significant achievement by the RAISE and Leaving Care team. RAISE is the Education, Employment and Training team for post statutory school age CLA and Care Leavers.
- Additionally, the overall trend for the whole cohort has been maintained with 67% in EET (this is always the lowest quarter for the year).
- 9% are now at university with another 1% of the post 18s already graduated.
- An increasing number are staying on in Further education