

REPORT TO: Children, Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 31 October 2011

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Children & Enterprise

SUBJECT: Young Carers Scrutiny Topic

WARDS: All Wards

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To report on the findings and recommendations of the Young Carers Scrutiny Topic Group that was established to consider the services to young carers and their effectiveness.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) The contents of the report are noted;**
- (2) The profile of young carers is raised within the Borough via a new strategy, which incorporates the issues raised during the scrutiny process.**
- (3) An action plan is formulated and implemented in order to deliver the new strategy**
- (4) The issue of young carers is brought back to the Board in twelve months to review progress and further developments**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Context and Methodolgy

3.1 Young carers are children and young people under the age of 18yrs who provide care to another family member who has a physical illness and/or disability; mental ill health; sensory disability or has a problematic use of drugs and/ or alcohol. The care given may be practical, physical and/or emotional. The level of care they provide would usually be undertaken by an adult and as a result their role potentially can impact on their childhood and ability to fully reach their potential.

3.2 The topic for young carers has been a subject to scrutiny since September 2010. This is because young carers are a vulnerable group given their family circumstances, and they could be defined as 'children in need' as defined within the Children Act 1989, especially when their caring role inhibits the experience and usual development of childhood. Based on research by Saul Becker et al (1995), it is suggested that 2.1% of the population of young people are young carers. Therefore there should be around 515 young carers living in Halton. However, there is some caution with this figure as it does not include those young carers

from families where there are drug and alcohol issues. It is likely that this figure is higher due to these 'hidden' carers.

3.3 The scrutiny process consisted of Members and Officers within Children and Families Services. Members were Cllr Mark Dennett; Cllr Kath Loftus; Cllr Margaret Horabin, Cllr Joan Lowe; Cllr Mike Fry; and Cllr Peter Browne. Officers were Nigel Moorhouse (Operational Director); Emma Taylor (Divisional Manager); and Tracey Dean (Principal Manager). At the start of the scrutiny process, key outputs and desired outcomes were agreed. These were:

- That young carers are appropriately identified, their needs assessed and a plan of support agreed (strong and effective pathway);
- That the needs of young carers figure prominently in strategic planning activity across the Council and partner agencies;
- That young carers are able to participate in everyday life, as children first;
- That services to young carers are inclusive and delivered as part of universal services, where appropriate, based on the Think Family model (ie the Team Around the Family- TAF- model within Halton);
- To increase the number of young carers identified and have their needs met.

3.4 To achieve these a number of activities took place:

- 3 Scrutiny Group meetings were held (October 2010, June 2011, July 2011) where current practice was examined as well as data and performance;
- Members observed the 2 Young Carers' Groups facilitated by HBC staff;
- One Member met individually with 2 young carers, with their permission. They were asked a number of relevant questions relating to their caring role; support services they received; and how useful they felt these were to them and their families (see **appendix 2**)

Service description- HBC staff and resources

3.3 In April 2010 HBC restructured its Children and Families Department and a new Division was created with the focus on early help and support. This Division brought together Children Centre provision, family support, the Integrated Working Support Team, short breaks for disabled children and their families; and support to young carers. Prior to this, support for young carers came via a voluntary organisation (HITS). As a result, 3 workers transferred to HBC where there is 76 hours (3 individual posts) of support available for young carers. There is 1 fte vacancy but the remaining 2 part time workers offer one to one support

(including home visits) and group work to young carers who need help regarding their self esteem and confidence.

Commissioned Services (including Carers Centre)

- 3.4 There are a range of services available to young carers and their families, by different providers. Adult Services commission a number of voluntary organisations to deliver counselling and short break activities to young carers. The Carers Centre is also commissioned to provide independent advice and signposting for all carers, including young carers. The Centre undertakes assessments of potential young carers, as well as awareness raising sessions with partner agencies.

Governance

- 3.5 Strategically, services to all carers and their effectiveness are monitored via the Carers Strategic Group, chaired by the Operational Director for Commissioning and Complex Care in Communities Directorate. There is representation from voluntary providers, Adults and Children's Services and Health. Operationally, these services are monitored via a number of LIT Groups (Local Implementation Teams). There is a specific LIT Group for young carers which is facilitated independently by a voluntary organisation (Action for Children). This Group differs from the others as it consists of young carers themselves as well as providers. The aim is to ensure full participation of young carers to identify gaps in provision and advise on future service development.

Halton's Children's Trust is ultimately responsible for the outcomes of young carers; therefore, regular reporting to the Trust is required regarding the strategy and its action plan.

Performance

- 3.6 As of 20 September 2011 there are 247 known and identified young carers in the Borough. This is the total number of individual carers registered with the Carers Centre, and those receiving a service from either contracted providers or HBC. The information from each organisation's database has been collated and each young carer has only been counted once.

Partnerships

- 3.7 There are a number of key partnerships in place that help HBC deliver a coordinated response to young carers. A particular development is awareness raising within schools. Work is underway to increase schools' knowledge about young carers and potential signs that a child may be undertaking caring roles within their family.

Following the restructure within the Children and Families' Department, there is increased joint working between Adults and Children's Services.

Joint monitoring of contracted services is now in place; and there is Senior Manager representation on both the Carers Strategic group and the Children's Trust, thereby ensuring consistency in approach across both Directorates.

Finance

- 3.8 HBC funds 2fte young carers posts which are held within the Team Around the Family model of early help and support (£42834). Currently, there is 1fte vacancy. Children and Families' Department also contributes £30,000 to the Carers Centre, which helps fund provision to young carers. Adult Services commission a number of voluntary organisations from the Carers Fund to provide short breaks and counselling service to young carers. This is a total of £22268.

Case Studies

- 3.9 There are a number of case studies, examined independently, that highlight that the positive impact that services have on young carers. In particular, young carers who attend the groups have written their own impact statements explaining how attending the groups (and having one to one sessions) has increased their self confidence and reduced their feelings of isolation. Please see **appendix 1** for a selection of these statements.

Scrutiny Process

- 3.10 The Scrutiny Group process highlighted a number of positive factors regarding young carers that came to light through Members' direct observations of Young Carers Support Groups and interviews with 2 young carers individually:
- Positive work is being undertaken by a range of organisations, including HBC.
 - There is evidence of positive impact of the services on young carers and their families. Young carers fed back that they no longer feel "guilty" about leaving their family for periods of time; and others feel more confident when with their peers
 - There is increased awareness of young carers' issues across the Borough
 - There is increased joint working between adults and children's services
- 3.11 The process also raised a number of areas for further development:
- **Service provision**- young carers' vulnerability means that early help services need to continue to support them and prevent their needs from escalating. Access to a range of services is important with clear of roles and expectations from providers and no duplication;
 - **Strategy**: this in need of review due to movement of staff and restructures. The strategy needs to reflect Halton's model of early help;

- **Participation:** HBC needs to ensure that the systems in place ensure meaningful participation from young carers, especially regarding effectiveness of services and future delivery. Most importantly, that young carers feel they are being listened to and can see positive change happen as a result.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There is a range of legislation that give HBC statutory responsibilities towards young carers and their families, eg Children Act 1989; Carers Equal Opportunities Act 2004; Services for Young Carers: A Framework.
- 4.3 The National Carers strategy (June 2008) highlighted the need for extended planned breaks for carers and the need for greater engagement with carers and more effective joint working between agencies.
- 4.4 Young Carers have a right to an assessment of their own needs as a carer and to have their views taken into account (Carers Recognition and Services act 1995). They are also entitled to assistance and support to engage in education and employment (Carers Equal opportunities Act 2004).
- 4.5 The implications here are that HBC must have a clear strategy for engaging, assessing, supporting and enabling young carers to reach their full potential and access the help they need via appropriate local services. This means a range of services, for example, counselling, group work, one to one time and short break provision. It also means that whilst carers have the right to have their own needs assessed, that this should be undertaken in conjunction with the whole family, ie a holistic approach is required to fully meet the needs of young carers.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 **Young Carers Strategy:** A new strategy is needed to fully incorporate the current structures, pathways and Children's Trust's priorities. It is recommended that a new strategy and action plan is implemented following consultation with providers, HBC staff and, of course, young carers themselves.
- 5.2 **Young carers' model:** The scrutiny process has helped highlight the need for a clearer model and pathway to services. Pathways should be clear with a continuum of services available to young carers with no duplication. A single point of entry is needed for young carers to access support, and organisations, including HBC, should all be clear on where they fit along the continuum of support. It is recommended that a new model and pathway of support for young carers is implemented following consultation with commissioned providers, Adults and Children's Services, and young carers.

5.3 Memorandum of Understanding: It has previously been agreed by Directors of Adults and Children's Services that close working is required when dealing with young carers and the issues this brings. A holistic approach is required, ie the whole family's needs should be considered to avoid issues being missed. The child's safety and well being is priority, whether a professional is working with the adult or child; and clear processes and protocols are required to ensure both Directorates deal with young carers effectively. The scrutiny process has helped to improve joint working between the Directorates and there is commitment to this continuing. This means the continuation of joint monitoring of contracts for short breaks for young carers; as well as joint strategic planning meetings and overview of services across both Directorates.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

It is the Children's Trust priority that outcomes for children and young people improve via access to early help and support services. It is also a priority that this is achieved by embedding integrated processes between agencies and effective joint commissioning of services locally. Most importantly, services needs to be targeted effectively to ensure that outcomes improve for the children and families with the greatest need. The strategy for young carers highlights all these priorities and focuses on need to offer early help for young carers and their families to help prevent their needs escalating and more specialist and intrusive intervention becoming necessary. The overriding objective is to enable young carers to enjoy their childhood and access the same opportunities whilst maintaining their caring role, wherever possible.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

All young carers have the right to continue their education and access further training or employment when they leave school. Their caring responsibilities should not restrict or prevent them from achieving their full potential. HBC needs to ensure that mechanisms are in place, via the strategy and action plan, to identify young carers within the Borough, offer the appropriate support services and prevent their caring role from impacting negatively on their own education and future employment plans. This requires effective awareness raising within schools and other universal provision (eg youth centres) where young carers are likely to be identified first.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Young carers are entitled to enjoy healthy lives, both physically and emotionally. Caring responsibilities can affect a young person's health in many ways; therefore, as in point 6.2, a clear strategy is required to ensure HBC works alongside health partners to help prevent long term health problems for young carers as they enter adulthood. Policies and procedures are needed that cover all aspects of young carers and the

challenges they face. Primary mental health services and CAMHS need to have processes in place to monitor and evaluate the emotional well being of young carers, especially where 'hidden harm' is a factor (ie the risk of the child's needs being ignored as a result of a parent with drug and/or alcohol issues).

6.4 A Safer Halton

Young carers need to feel safe and secure whilst undertaking their caring responsibilities. There are potential safeguarding issues; especially 'hidden harm' is an issue. HBC needs to ensure clear processes to deal with these issues and it is essential that Children's and Adults Service work closely together so that young carers' needs and safety are fully considered when working with adults where there are mental health, drug and/or alcohol issues. Clear lines of responsibility and accountability are required. This needs to be fully considered within the strategy and action plan.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

There are no implications here.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 The recommendations in this report give opportunities to build on the successes so far regarding services and outcomes for young carers. There is scope for further improvement and plans are already in place

7.2 The risk is that the ongoing and future success of the strategy will depend on availability of funding both from Adults and Children's Services. Improving outcomes for young carers will depend on early help services being available in order to help prevent young carers' needs escalating, leaving them more vulnerable to more intrusive interventions (ie statutory services).

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

N/A

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None under the meaning of the Act