

REPORT TO: Children & Young People's Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 3rd November 2008

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Children & Young People

SUBJECT: Transitions for Children in Care

WARDS: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide Members with an overview of the issues that impact on Children in Care and their experience of transition from care into adult life.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Members

- Note the content of the report
- Consider how they can take forward their role as Corporate Parents.
- Consider how to strengthen the scrutiny function to ensure that Officers and Partner agencies are held to account for the support provided to Children in Care as they make the transition into adult life.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 There are 148 Children in Care in Halton and 78 care leavers. The population of Children in Care has remained consistent over a number of years as a result of the emphasis placed on supporting families and seeing care as a final positive choice for children and young people. Children who come into care in Halton do so only after all other options have been fully explored and exhausted.
- 3.2 All children who come into care have a clear plan, which considers the needs of the individual child and how these needs can be matched to an alternative carer and other service provision. The health and well being of the child drives the care planning process.
- 3.3 In the vast majority of cases, the plan is in the form of a Care Order, which gives the Council parental responsibility for the care and welfare of the individual child until they are 18 and are able to live independently.
- 3.4 All Care plans are subject to regular review and to external scrutiny by an Independent Review Manager (IRM)
- 3.5 A central consideration in the care planning process is the need to help the child cope with their past and plan for their futures. This is relevant at all

stages in a child's life in care but has particular relevance when preparing for independent living.

- 3.6 From the age of 14 all Children in Care are encouraged to think about leaving care. This process is known as Pathway Planning. The Pathway Plan considers what skills the young person will need to live independently, the support they will need along the way and critically where to live and what to do. In Halton responsibility for Pathway Planning is taken forward by a Young Peoples Team, managed in Social Care but made up of professionals from Connexions, the Third Sector, Social Care and Health.
- 3.7 All Members and Senior Officers of the Council are Corporate Parents. This responsibility is set out in regulations and all Members received a letter from the then Secretary of State Frank Dobson outlining their role. In essence the expectation is that Members take the same level of interest in the welfare of Children in Care, as they would do if the child were their own.
- 3.8 Members have previously received a briefing on their role as Corporate Parents from Yolanda Corden (Interim Operational Director Specialist Services) in July 2007.
- 3.9 Regulation 33 visits, membership of the Children in Care Council, the Fostering and Adoption Panels, Climbie audits, and the policy for the employment of Children in Care by the Council are examples of how this responsibility works in practice.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are a lot of strengths in the support provided to Children in Care as they make the transition into adult life. All Children in Care have a social worker, clear plans, good support from a range of services and many young people make a success of their lives when they leave care.
- 4.2 There is however a number of issues that impact on Children in Care as they start to live independent lives.
- 4.3 The average age at which children in Halton leave care is 17.5. This is older than it was 2 years ago but is still a lot younger than in the general population, who on average leave home at 24. Many of us will know from personal experience that leaving home is not an event and is more of a process. How many of us still go home for a meal, advise, and support? Children in Care find this continuity of support very difficult to achieve. When you consider the circumstances, which have contributed to the need for a child to come into care, it is not surprising that many young people find this transition extremely difficult to cope with.

4.3 ACTIONS

- i). The Children in Care Strategy (Appendix 1) and JAR improvement plan identify the actions required to address the areas for improvement

identified in the JAR and in the Care Matters Change for Children program. Care Matters sets out a new deal for Children in Care and for care leavers. This new deal provides many challenges for the Council and the Children's Trust but in many ways provides us with a real opportunity to get things right.

- ii). We will need to improve the continuity of planning for children as they leave care and delay the "event" until the young person is ready to leave home. Extending the offer for young people to stay with their carer until they are 21 is the beginning of this process. Whilst this will cost money and may impact on the availability of placements for other children this is an essential first step to improving outcomes for Children in Care. A feasibility exercise is currently being undertaken in social care as part of the development of a placement strategy for Children in Care.
- iii). Social care teams will need to be reconfigured to avoid the transfer of case management when a young person reaches the age of 16. A more suitable age would be 13/14 as this is a time when all young people start to consider their futures as they decide on the Key Stage 4 options.
- iv). The Council and Children's trust will need to fully implement the Care Leavers employment policy, which guarantees care leavers a job or an entitlement to ongoing training and learning. All Directorates in the Council, the LSP and Children's Trust will need to commit to this policy. The support services required to enable young people to engage with this offer are managed by social care.
- v). The Council, LSP and Children's Trust will need to secure from local housing trusts and registered social landlords a range of accommodation sufficient to give a choice to care leavers about where they live.

4.4 The recent Corporate Parenting conference held on the 10th October reaffirmed these actions and highlighted the need for these actions to be owned not just by social care professionals but by all those who work with our children and have a responsibility for their parenting.

4.5 **NEXT STEPS**

- The Corporate Parenting conference is rerun in February 2009 for all Members, Senior Officers in the Council, LSP and Children's Trust, Head Teachers and Chairs of Governors. This event would ensure that all these key people are made aware of their role and responsibilities with regard to Children in Care, and are able to explicitly identify how they intend to take forward their Corporate Parenting responsibilities.
- Members scrutinize the implementation of the Children in Care Employment Policy to ensure that care leavers are given every opportunity to find employment in the Council, LSP and Children's Trust partner agencies.

- Members scrutinize the provision of accommodation for care leavers and in particular the reasons why care leavers live in temporary accommodation.
- Members scrutinize the implementation of the Children in Care Strategy and JAR improvement plan.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Children in Care are citizens of the Borough who have the same rights as any other child or young person. Their welfare and safety is central to all Council priorities.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

Children in Care do less well in their education than the majority of children and young people. Ensure good educational outcomes and proper access to training and employment is the acid test of Corporate Parenting.

6.2 A Healthy Halton

Children in Care experience poorer health than the general population. The emotional resilience of Children in Care is critical to a successful transition into adult life. The proportion of care leavers who are teen parents or expectant mothers is significantly higher than in the general population.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

Children in Care and care leavers should be considered as a disadvantaged group given the outcomes they experience

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Care Matters-Change for Children	Children and Young People's Directorate Grosvenor House Halton Lea Runcorn WA7 2WD	Christine Taylor Divisional Manager Children in Care