

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 10th April 2008

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Children and Young People

SUBJECT: Children in Care Strategy and the Children & Young Persons Bill

WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To seek endorsement of the revised Children in Care Strategy, which is the Council's response to the Government's Care Matters Agenda and Children and Young Persons Bill
- 1.2 To identify potential financial implications for the Local Authority arising from the Children & Young Persons Bill.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) That Executive Board endorse the amended strategy for Children in Care; and**
- (2) That the Executive Board notes the potential financial implications pending more detailed information and direction from Government.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Care Matters Green Paper was published in October 2006 and the White Paper was presented to Parliament in June 2007.
- 3.2 The Executive Summary states that, "Despite high ambitions and a shared commitment for change, outcomes for Children and Young People in Care have not sufficiently improved. There remains a gap between the quality of their lives and those of all children. Tackling this requires urgent, sustained action across central and local government, from practitioners in all aspects of children and young people's lives and from their parents, friends and family".
- 3.3 This intention to improve the situation for Children in Care and further strengthen the legislative framework which underpins the care system, is reflected in the Children and Young Persons Bill which was introduced to the House of Lords on the 14th November 2007 and is likely to become Legislation in 2008.
- 3.4 The Bill seeks to ensure that children and young people in Care receive high quality care and support, and aims to enable them to achieve the same aspirations that parents have for their own children.

3.5 National comparisons between children in care and other children show that:

- In 2006, only 12% of children in care achieved 5A* - C grades at GCSE (or equivalent) compared to 59% of all children.
- Over 45% of children in care are assessed as having a mental health disorder compared with approximately 10% of the general population.
- Almost 10% of children in care aged 10 or over were cautioned or convicted of an offence in 2006, which is almost 3 times the rate for all children of this age.
- Some 30% of care leavers aged 19 were not in education, employment or training.

3.6 In Halton, the figures show that

- In 2006-07, 20% of children in care achieved 5 A* - C grades at GCSE (or equivalent) compared to 59% of all children.
- 7.2% of children in care aged 10 or over were cautioned or convicted of an offence in 2006-07.
- 80% of care leavers aged 19 were not in education, employment or training in 2007. In real terms this equates to 12 out of 15 care leavers not in education, employment or training although this was a particularly challenging cohort and Halton's performance in this area had previously been better
- 44% of Care Leavers in Halton were living in temporary accommodation at January 2008.

3.7 Within Halton, a multi agency strategy for Children in Care has been in place since 2005. For the past two years, the task of implementing the strategy has been undertaken by the Partnership Board of the Children in Care Mini Trust and by the Corporate Parenting group. The following has been achieved: -

- Integrated working has been established between the Children and Young People's Directorate, CAMHS, the CiC Nurse, Connexions workers, Young Addaction and the Youth Service. Workers from these services are based either on a part time or virtual basis with the Permanence and Young People's Teams. The Children in Care Education Support Service is permanently co-located within the Permanence Team
- Additional Personal Advisor support is provided by Connexions to care leavers to retain work placements
- Young people leaving care are provided with financial assistance and incentives to encourage them into work
- Care leavers can progress to an Employment Scheme which provides 26 weeks paid work experience with the hope that they are then able to progress to full time employment
- More young people in care who have chosen not to have a formal health assessment have accessed an alternative approach
- A fast track protocol has been established with CAMHS for CiC referrals

- The Intensive Support Team, Education Support Service and CAMHS work with carers who are experiencing difficulties to maintain the child in placement.
- Almost all children placed for adoption have had a Life Appreciation Day as part of the adoption planning process.
- We have worked with other areas to develop good practice in adoption in the borough.
- A PEP Dowry scheme is providing a range of support for CiC and their education
- The CiC Scrutiny and Monitoring Group reviews education performance on a monthly basis with a particular focus on those sitting exams. Additional 1:1 support is then provided as required
- Care placements are tracked and placement support provided as needed to try and reduce disruption in GCSE years.
- Multi-agency support packages for CiC pupils who are in danger of being excluded are implemented
- Provision of 1:1 in class support, 1:1 support for education off site, curriculum support and tuition, advice and guidance on behavioural issues depending on individual need
- Fast-track Education Psychology Service support
- Early Years CiC Action Group has developed the early years PEP and ensured that entitlement to provision is taken up
- The Youth Service are focusing on involving more CiC in provision. This includes the Duke of Edinburgh Award.
- The accommodation support worker tracks individual's housing applications and reports on allocations
- A high level of individual support is provided to care leavers in preparation for taking on and maintaining tenancies

3.8 The strategy (Appendix 2) has now been revised to incorporate the provisions of Care Matters and the Children and Young Persons Bill, which are grouped around the following areas:

- Corporate Parenting
- Family and Parenting Support
- Care placements
- Care planning and review
- Education
- Promoting health and wellbeing
- Transition to adulthood
- Social work practice

- 3.9 Importantly, the strategy also reflects some of the consultation that has taken place with Children and Young People who are or have been in care in Halton Borough Council.
- 3.10 By having one clear Children in Care strategy, which incorporates all requirements, expectations are clear and the direction is coherent.
- 3.11 Whilst the narrative of the strategy is concise to encourage wide ownership and engagement, the detail is contained within the Action Plan at the end of the strategy.
- 3.12 The Action Plan will primarily form the business of the Partnership Board of the Children in Care Mini Trust. Many agencies and partners are represented on this Board including Halton and St Helens Primary Care Trust, Youth Offending Team, Connexions, Voluntary Sector, Halton Borough Council Councillor, Halton Housing Trust, Cheshire Police, Youth Service, Children and Young People Specialist, Preventative and Learning Services, Halton Borough Council Leisure and Transport Services.
- 3.13 Membership of the Partnership Board is regularly reviewed to ensure wide representation and to address areas of priority. For example, given that improving employment opportunities for Care Leavers is a priority area, a representative from Enterprise and Employment has now been asked to join the Board. Similar approaches will be made to the Education Business Partnership and the Chamber of Commerce.
- 3.14 If approved, the Partnership Board will develop the Action Plan further to ensure that impact and outcome measures are clearly identified and timescales for achievement are more precise.
- 3.15 The multi agency strategy recognises that everyone in Halton has a part to play in improving the outcomes for children in care. It establishes the aspirations and shared priorities of all those who are Corporate Parents and who are therefore responsible for ensuring that children and young people in care have the same opportunities as their peers.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The strategy requires corporate support so that the duties and aspirations of the Corporate Parent are reflected in all Council policies.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 In order to achieve the actions required, additional financial resources have been provided by Government.
- 5.2 The Government has allocated funding to each Local Authority to support the implementation of Care Matters. In respect of Halton, the indicative figures are: -

- 2007 – 2008 £ 9,000
- 2008 – 2009 £101,000
- 2009 – 2010 £141,000
- 2010 – 2011 £164,000

5.3 Whilst the detail of some of the proposals is awaited, and taking into account the changing nature of the children in care cohort, it is difficult to predict the exact costs associated with Care Matters. However, initial estimates (Appendix 1) suggest that the grant funding alone will be insufficient to meet the likely requirements of the Bill.

5.4 From the initial estimates, the summary of potential costs for implementation of the Children and Young Persons Bill and Care Matters are as follows:

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Total estimated (legislation requirement)	(70,000)	(68,000)	(68,000)
Total estimated (other)	(70,500)	(143,500)	(201,000)
	(140,500)	(211,500)	(269,000)
Less Care Matters grant income	101,000	141,000	164,000
Less Core Budget Contribution	39,500	39,500	39,500
Deficit Estimate		(31,000)	(65,500)
Balance brought forward			(31,000)
Total estimated shortfall per annum		(31,000)	(96,500)

5.5 The total estimated shortfall in funding is £96,500. As the grant figures for 2009/10 and 2010/11 are both indicative only, this shortfall may increase. Ways will be examined to close the shortfall identified in future years but it may be necessary for this to be considered as apart of the budget process.

5.6 As they will be enshrined in legislation, the requirements of the Children and Young Persons Bill are identified first in the costings matrix (items 1 – 6), and will be given priority in 2008/09. These can be funded from the indicative grant.

5.7 The remaining actions are from the Care Matters White Paper, some of which are required and some of which are recommended. These have been given a timescale over the next 3 years, which may need to be adjusted as further guidance is issued.

5.8 The directorate will be proactive in raising the issue of funding with relevant bodies, including the Local Government Association and the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

The proposal is consistent with the priority given to ensuring that all Halton children and young people are safeguarded, healthy and happy, and receive

their entitlement of high quality services that are sensitive to need, inclusive and accessible to all.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

One of the key areas of focus for both Care Matters and the Halton Children in Care Strategy is to improve the educational attainment of children in care. Ultimately this is essential to ensuring that care leavers are able to continue accessing learning and employment opportunities.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Promotion of the physical and emotional wellbeing of children in care is an essential component in securing positive outcomes for them in all areas of their lives.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Achieving positive outcomes for children in care will contribute to the role that they play in their local communities and will impact on their ability to make a positive contribution.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Increasing the ability of children in care to make a positive contribution and achieve economic wellbeing are key features of the strategy. Success in these areas will be of wider benefit to the borough as well as of individual benefit to the young person.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 Implementation of the requirements of the Children and Young Persons Bill and Care Matters will be essential in order to comply with legislation and Government guidance.

7.2 Over the three-year programme of Care Matters there will be some opportunity to prioritise, which actions are addressed first, but ultimately all will need to be implemented.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 Given that children in care are recognised as a vulnerable group whose life chances and outcomes are poor, the strategy will have a positive impact on improving both these areas and ensuring that they enjoy the same opportunities as their peers.

9.0 REASON FOR DECISION

9.1 Endorsement of the multi agency strategy is sought so that progress can continue on meeting the requirements of Care Matters, the duties of Corporate Parents and the targets of the Children and Young People Plan.

10.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

10.1 There is no alternative option to implementing Care Matter and the Children and Young Persons Bill.

10.2 Consideration was given to presenting separate strategies in respect of Children in Care, Care Matters and Corporate Parenting, but as these issues are so integral to each other the production of one coherent strategy was favoured.

11.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

11.1 Work on some of the Care Matters issues is already underway but inspection against improved outcomes for children in care will commence in 2008.

11.2 If approved, work on the strategy will commence in April 2008.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Care Matters	Grosvenor House	Christine Taylor
Children and Young Persons bill (draft)	Grosvenor House	Christine Taylor