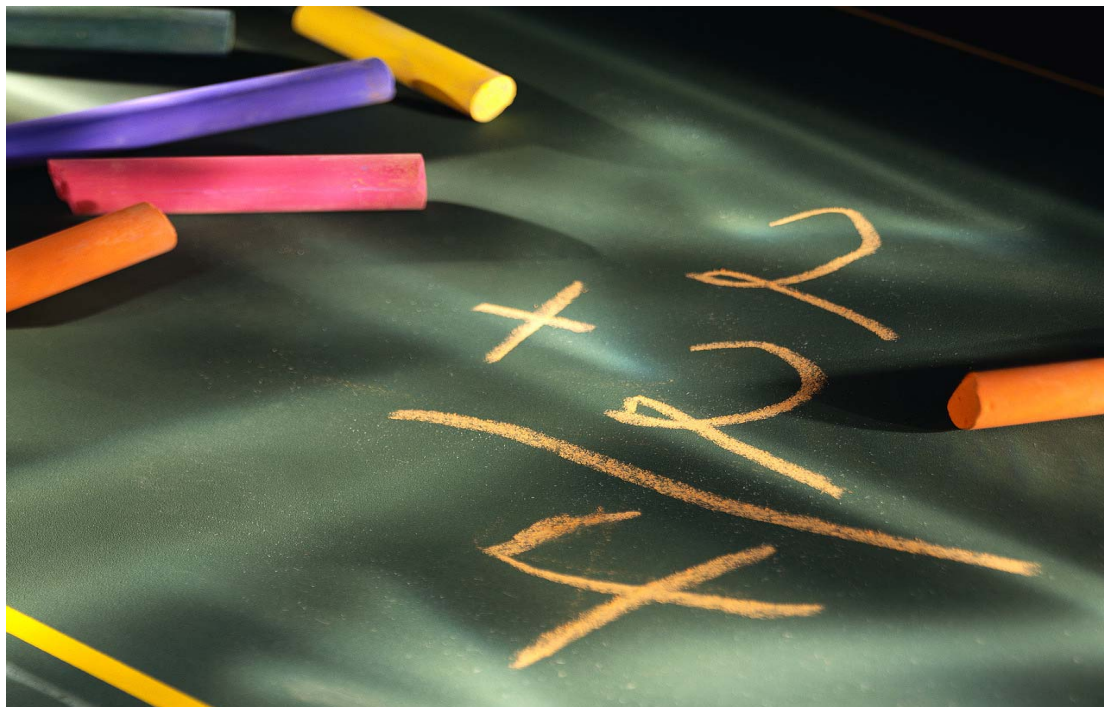


A+dding Value?

A Scrutiny Report about Improving the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children in County Durham



**Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Strong,
Healthy and Safe Communities**

5 June 2006



Making a difference where you live

“We are all on a ladder of life. Most of us have a ladder which has a steady upwards incline, and although we may occasionally be faced with wind or rain, generally the climb is in fair conditions. On the way, we gain attainments – GCSEs, Degrees and professional qualifications and we continue the climb. Going up the ladder odd rungs may be loose or worn, but we are doing the climb in broad daylight and can spot the hazards.

It’s different for some others, and Looked After Children would be part of this. Their ladder does not have a steady incline. In fact, it may be perpendicular or, at other times, flat on the ground. Rain and wind are an almost constant companion, except when the climb is in glaring sunshine or in the dark. Rungs may be worn, broken and missing and in the conditions, never seen, until the person climbing the ladder is upon them. Attainment is something that other people have time for.”

Submission by a County Council Senior Social Worker

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यदि आप इरा सूचना का सार हिन्दी में चाहते हैं, तो कृपया 0191 383 3149 पर फोन करें।

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"اگر آپ کو ان معلومات کا خلاصہ اردو میں چاہئے تو برائے مہربانی 0191 383 3149"

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Section One – Foreword



For many people, the term “Looked After Children” (or children in care) suggests young people who have ended up in the care of a local authority because they are disruptive and difficult to bring up. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The biggest reason for children being taken into care is not because of anything they have done themselves. More often, it stems from abuse or neglect within the family home, frequently linked to alcohol or substance misuse by parents or carers. Sometimes young people go into care because they are carers themselves, either for parents or siblings and they require some respite from their caring role.

When young people enter the looked after system, the County Council acts as a corporate parent. This means that all of our Councillors individually have responsibilities. The Council is responsible for ensuring that the young people in its care receive the same support that any parent would wish to give to their own children.

Amongst the greatest of gifts we can give to young people is education. Research shows that those who do well academically get the best jobs and go on to lead socially inclusive lives. Looked After Children perform less well in exams than children generally and this impacts significantly upon their future lives and well-being.

The background to this scrutiny investigation was the specific stretch target about the educational attainment of Looked After Children agreed by the County Council with Government in the first generation Local Public Service Agreement (which the Council did not achieve) and the Council’s improvement priorities linked to vulnerable children.

Whilst the academic performance of Looked After Children in County Durham is improving and is not markedly different than that in some other local authorities, there are Councils where Looked After Children do better. The Government has also made it clear that it expects to see year-on-year improvements in the educational attainment of young people who are Looked After.

This report contains a number of recommendations which seek to improve the educational support that Looked After Children receive. I hope that these recommendations will be given serious consideration and that they will lead to enhanced future life chances for the young people in our care.

I would like to thank all those members of the Working Group who have invested a considerable amount of time in this scrutiny investigation. Thanks also to the officers from Children’s and Young People’s Services (formerly Social Care and Health and Education) and Corporate Services who have supported the project.

Councillor Dorothy Bowman
Chair of the Looked After Children
Scrutiny Working Group

Section Two – Background to the Project and Terms of Reference

Background to the Project

- 2.1 The project was instituted by the Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Strong, Healthy and Safe Communities in June 2005, following the annual Overview and Scrutiny Development Session. The issue suggested for scrutiny at that session was improved life chances for children, which formed one of the Council's priorities for improvement. The educational attainment of Looked After Children was deemed to be an important aspect of this priority, having formed one of the stretch targets within the Council's first generation Local Public Service Agreement. The target of 16% of Looked After Children achieving 5 A* to C GCSEs by 2005 had not been fully met, with only 6.6% of Looked After Children having achieved the relevant grades in that year.

Terms of Reference

- 2.2 The terms of reference of the Working Group were agreed as follows:

“To review the services currently provided to enhance the lives of Looked After Children in County Durham and to consider how their educational attainment, particularly at GCSE level, might be improved.”

Section Three – Executive Summary and Recommendations

Introduction

- 3.1 There are over 400 Looked After Children in County Durham at any one time. Most are in care not because of things they themselves have done - the majority have suffered abuse or neglect. Children who are in the care of the County Council have the same rights, needs and expectations as any other child. Frank Dobson, MP, writing to Councillors in 1998 said “For children who are looked after, your Council has a legal and moral duty to try and provide the kind of loyal support that any good parent would give to their children.” The County Council is a corporate parent to all the children in its care and County Councillors individually have the same responsibilities.
- 3.2 Outcomes for many Looked After Children are well below those of the rest of society. At a conference in 2006, Maria Eagle, MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Young People and Families, told delegates that:

- Only 50% of Looked After Children gain 1 GCSE, compared with 96% of children generally
- Only 5% of Looked After Children go on to Higher Education
- 25-30% of Looked After Children end up in custody at some point
- A large % of Looked After Children end up as rough sleepers
- Young people who gain at least one GCSE have much better outcomes in terms of employment and social inclusion
- Only 59% of Looked After Children are entered for GCSEs
- Many Looked After Children go to the worst, not the best schools – only 3% of Looked After Children are in the top 25% of schools and 42% are in the bottom 25% of schools
- Looked After Children are 10 times more likely to be permanently excluded from school
- To be effective, intervention must take place as early as possible
- Special education needs and moving schools regularly are the 2 most significant factors impacting on the educational attainment of Looked After Children and worst of all is moving school at Year 10.

Performance Measures for Educational Attainment of Looked After Children

- 3.3 There are between 30-40 Looked After Children in Year 11 (GCSE exams) every year in County Durham. The performance of Looked After Children in the County is improving, but is still below national targets. There are targets for:
- 1 or more GCSEs at Grades A* to G
 - 5 or more GCSEs at Grades A* to G
 - 5 or more GCSEs at Grades A* to C

- 3.4 The County Council agreed a stretch target in the first Local Public Service Agreement with Government that 16% of Looked After Children would achieve a minimum of 5 GCSEs at Grades A* to C by 2005. The target was not fully met, with 6.6% of young people achieving the required grades. This was one of factors which prompted the scrutiny investigation. During the course of the investigation, performance increased, particularly in relation to 1 or more GCSEs at A* to G.

The Reasons for Under-Performance

- 3.5 There are many reasons why young people who are Looked After perform less well in education than young people generally. The Social Exclusion Report 2003 advanced a number of factors as to why this may be:

- Too much time out of school
- Lives characterised by instability
- Insufficient help with their education if they get behind
- Primary carers not equipped or expected to provide sufficient support for learning and development (some carers have previous poor experiences of school themselves)
- Unmet emotional, physical and mental health needs that impact on Looked After Children's education.

- 3.6 Of the 400 or more Looked After Children in County Durham, the majority are placed with foster carers. Many will go on to return to their families at some point, but a significant number will remain in long term care and may also need support through the transition of leaving care.
- 3.7 Early in the project, members of the Working Group heard about the complexity of the performance measures for educational attainment of Looked After Children. These can vary, according to Year, Care Leaver, or length of time Looked After. The Working Group learnt that there are very small numbers of Looked After Children who are in each Year 11 cohort (typically 30-40). This means that the failure of a small number of children to achieve predicted GCSE grades can have a significant detrimental impact on performance. It was also pointed out that each cohort typically has some young people with special educational needs and a very small number of young people whose behaviour is so challenging that it may not be possible for them to achieve in strict academic terms.

Evidence

- 3.8 At the beginning of the scrutiny investigation it was decided that the Working Group would attempt to look at all aspects of the care and support provided for Looked After Children, given the wide range of factors which can influence their educational performance. Evidence about emotional and mental health needs was taken from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and the STEPS Therapeutic Service and for physical health, from the Looked After Children's Nurses. The Working Group also looked closely at the specialist

support provided by the Education Access Service. Every school in County Durham should have a designated teacher and designated governor, responsible for championing Looked After Children's educational needs and the views of these champions were also sought as part of the scrutiny process. The Working Group also spoke with foster carers, who have a key role, and most important of all, consultation was undertaken with Looked After Children and Care Leavers to ascertain their views about the support they had received. The Group also spoke with other bodies providing support, such as Care in Durham. The Group also looked at best practice in other local authorities and, bearing in mind value for money and competition, at independent sector support for the education of Looked After Children.

Conclusions

- 3.9 The Working Group found that provision for supporting the educational attainment of Looked After Children in County Durham was generally good, with staff and carers who are dedicated and committed to what they do. The provision of an in-house Access Service has assisted greatly, although key workers have heavy caseloads and there are still issues about support for Looked After Children below Year 5 and the completion of Personal Education Plans which need to be addressed. All the agencies the Group spoke with appeared to work well together and the move towards integrated Children's and Young People's Services should further assist in this regard. Whilst the Working Group felt that the drive to help Looked After Children achieve academically needed to be sustained, it recognises that, for some young people, it is as important, if not more important, that their emotional and behavioural needs are addressed first to enable them on leaving care to go on to play their full part as members of society. For some young people there may need to be an alternative pathway, with greater assistance for vocational studies and skills which will allow them when leaving care to be able to support themselves. As a major employer locally, the Council may itself wish to consider how it can provide assistance in this area.
- 3.10 The Working Group felt that there were a number of areas where recommendations for improvement should be made. These have been grouped around a number of themes as follows:

- The role and actions of the Council as Corporate Parent
- The functions of Designated Teachers and Governors
- The role of Foster Carers
- Support for Children who are Looked After and Recognition of Achievement

Summary of Recommendations

The Council as a Corporate Parent

3.11 It is the role of the Council to be responsible for all aspects of care for Looked After Children. This is not just the responsibility of officers and those Councillors who are members of the Corporate Parenting Panel. It is the responsibility of every member of the Council. Although the role of the Corporate Parenting Panel has developed over time and the value of the arrangements in County Durham has been recognised in previous Inspection Reports, the Working Group felt that there were still areas for improvement. These include clarifying the role of the Panel; increased member participation in the corporate parenting role; building stronger links with Looked After Children and Carers; and better scrutinising the educational attainment of young people through Regulation 33 Visits. The detailed recommendations of the Working Group in relation to these issues are set out in Section 14 of this Report.

The Role of Designated Teachers and Governors

3.12 Designated teachers and governors have key roles in championing Looked After Children within the education system. They need to be pro-active in this role, whilst recognising the sensitivities and stigmatisation that being a Looked After Child can bring to young people within school settings. The Group felt on occasions that, whilst the overwhelming majority of designated teachers and governors were conscientious in their role, in some areas it appeared that more could be done. Being a designated teacher for Looked After Children is not easy, given all the other competing demands upon teachers' time, but it is a key role and young people who spoke to the Working Group made it clear that having a teacher (and also a social worker) who cared made "all the difference". Given that scrutiny too is about making a difference, the Working Group is making a number of recommendations about issues such as the accuracy and type of data about designated governors; training and networking opportunities for designated governors and teachers; mechanisms for better championing the educational needs of Looked After Children and rewards/recognition for designated teachers. The detailed recommendations of the Working Group in relation to these issues are set out in Section 14 of this Report.

Foster Carers

3.13 It is foster carers who can bring the love and normality of family life to the Looked After Children in their care, but they need ongoing support to do this, particularly in relation to ensuring that the young people in their care are receiving a good education and where appropriate, good vocational pathway advice. The Working Group felt that there were opportunities to develop closer working between teachers and carers; to provide more information to enable carers to successfully challenge exclusions; for professional staff to use language which is more understandable for carers; to introduce clearer more consistent policies aimed at supporting the IT needs of young people in public care; enhanced arrangements for dialogue with corporate parents; and training for carers (with sufficient notice) to enable them to better assist young people with homework. The detailed recommendations of the Working Group in relation to these issues are set out in Section 14 of this Report.

Enhanced Support for Looked Children and Recognition of Achievement

3.14 Whilst the Working Group acknowledges the considerable amount of support currently provided for Children who are Looked After, a number of issues were raised in evidence which the Working Group feels merit closer attention. These include the role of schools in terms of stability; prevention and appeals against exclusion; under Year 5 support; IT provision; quiet time and study areas in Children's Homes; better vocational pathways; recognition and rewards for Looked After Children who perform well; recognition for those organisations that provide support to Looked After Children; student mentoring, STEPS support; the role of the independent sector; the Audit Commission toolkit; and the role of the Council as an employer. The detailed recommendations of the Working Group in relation to these issues are set out in Section 14 of this Report.

Section Four - Methodology

Sources of Information

- 4.1 The following sources were employed in undertaking this scrutiny project:
- Evidence provided directly to the Working Group by practitioners in the fields of Social Care, Education and Health
 - Evidence gathered via attendance at:
 - Conference about the Education of Looked After Children
 - Training Session for Designated Governors
 - Consultation with:
 - Looked After Children and Care Leavers
 - Foster Carers
 - Survey (by postal questionnaire) of Designated Teachers and Governors
 - Research by Northumbria University about best practice in other local authorities
 - Written evidence from independent sector providers in the field of education provision for Looked After Children



Section Five – Who are Looked After Children and Who Looks After Them?

Some Definitions

- 5.1 A child is “Looked After” by a local authority if he/she is in their care:
- By reason of a Court Order; or is
 - Being provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours by agreement with the parents (or with the child if he/she is aged 16 or over).

Why are Children taken into Care?

- 5.2 There are many reasons why young people may be taken into care and become Looked After. Often, this is through no fault of their own. Children are only taken into care when people are really worried that they are suffering or are likely to suffer significant harm from the way they are being looked after by their parents.
- 5.3 Sometimes this may be because their parents aren’t caring properly for them and are neglecting them. They may not be taking their children to see a doctor when they need to go, or they may not be giving their children enough to eat or drink.
- 5.4 In some cases, it may be because the parents/carers have harmed their children or allowed someone else to harm them. This includes causing physical harm or sexual abuse. Both physical harm and sexual abuse also cause emotional harm. Being taken into care and becoming Looked After is something that is of major significance in the lives of the young people affected, particularly for those who are too young to know the reasons why this is happening.
- 5.5 ‘Care proceedings’ is the phrase used to describe the legal process by which social services make recommendations to the court about whether a child or young person should go into care. Social services can ask the court to make temporary orders (called ‘interim care orders’) while matters are investigated further and plans are made. In the end, if assessments conclude that a care order is necessary, social services will ask for a full care order to be made. A Care Order may only be made by a Court if it is satisfied that the child concerned is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm and that harm or likelihood of harm is attributable to the care given to the child or likely to be given to him if the Order were not made. A Care Order can also be made if a child is beyond parental control.
- 5.6 The making of a care order means that the social services department of the local authority, acting through its social workers, must make sure the children involved are safe and properly looked after. The court does this by giving social services a share of ‘parental responsibility’ for the children. This ensures social workers are allowed to make important decisions about the children. Social services should take those decisions in discussion with anyone else who has ‘parental responsibility’ for the children (mothers always have parental responsibility and fathers sometimes do). Social services should also discuss

these things with the children themselves. However, if there is an interim care order or a full care order, social services have the final say, subject to anything that may be ordered by the court. The most important thing social services can decide is with whom the children live.

- 5.7 The order sets out in detail what social services department thinks is best for the children. It contains information about where the child should live and who should look after him or her. All aspects of the child's care are covered, including any special help the child may need and who they should see. It must also contain contingency or alternative plans in case the first plans go wrong for whatever reason.
- 5.8 It should take less than 40 weeks for a court to decide what will happen. During that time a lot will be going on. Assessments will be undertaken to decide what the level of risk of harm to the children would be if they were to return home. Social Services will also try to work with the parents to reduce any risk there may be.
- 5.9 The case study below gives one example of a young person in the care system.

Dean

Twenty-year-old Dean was taken into care at the age of 11 because of his father's drunken and violent behaviour. 'First I lived with foster carers, then in children's homes and finally in supported housing. Trouble is, I kept getting kicked out of places. At other times I'd stay with mates. By the time I was sixteen I had nowhere to go except off the rails. I had lost contact with my brother and two sisters and was partying all the time. Frankly, for most of that time I was a rebel and a right pain in the butt.'

Dean was referred to his local NCH leaving care project. 'I treated them just the same at first. I was F-ing and blinding all the time, mugging them for money, being a complete pain. But gradually things changed. My key worker was really persistent and gradually the message began to sink in – it was time for me to grow up.

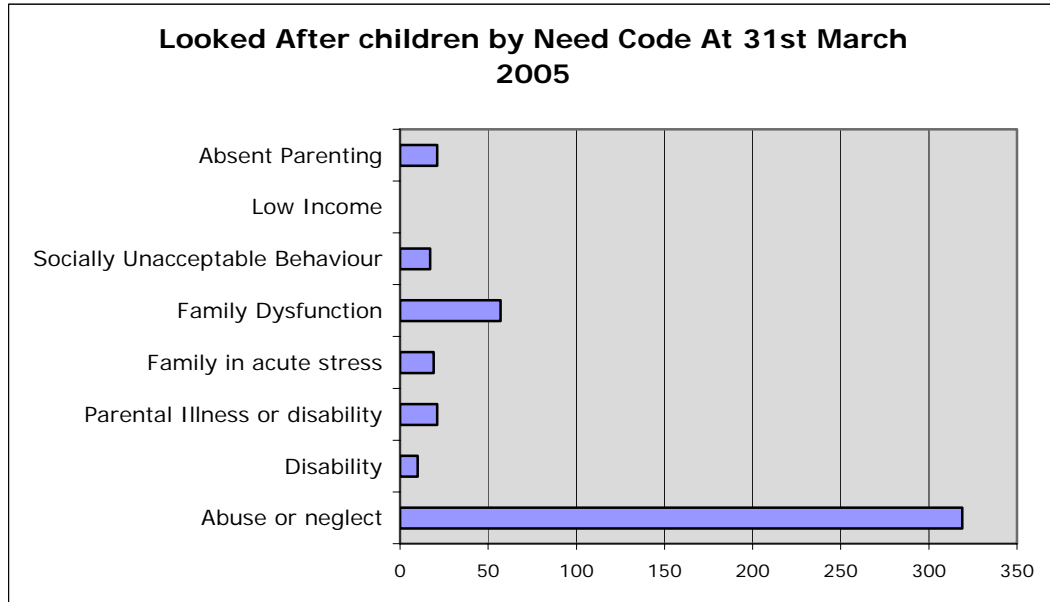
'Ever since then the regular support I've had from the project has been fantastic. They've always been positive and encouraging. They set up some work experience and training for me, they helped me get back in touch with my family; they persuaded me to think about going to college. They've helped in other practical ways too – managing my benefits, teaching me to budget responsibly, helping me with shopping, that sort of thing.

Two years on and Dean is completing a GNVQ in Business studies and is planning to do his A-levels. He has moved on, with the project's help, to live independently in his own council flat. 'Life,' he says, is 'pretty damn good. I've worked hard to get where I am today and I'm really grateful for the support I've had from NCH. If it wasn't for them I reckon I'd still be a complete screw-up.'

Dean remains in touch with the project and is a member of its participation group, helping with things like staff recruitment and induction. 'It's my way of saying thank you.'

Children Looked After - Numbers and Causes

5.10 At 31 March 2005 there were 464 Looked After Children in County Durham. Over 300 of these were looked after by reason of abuse or neglect. The table below sets out the main reasons for children becoming Looked After:



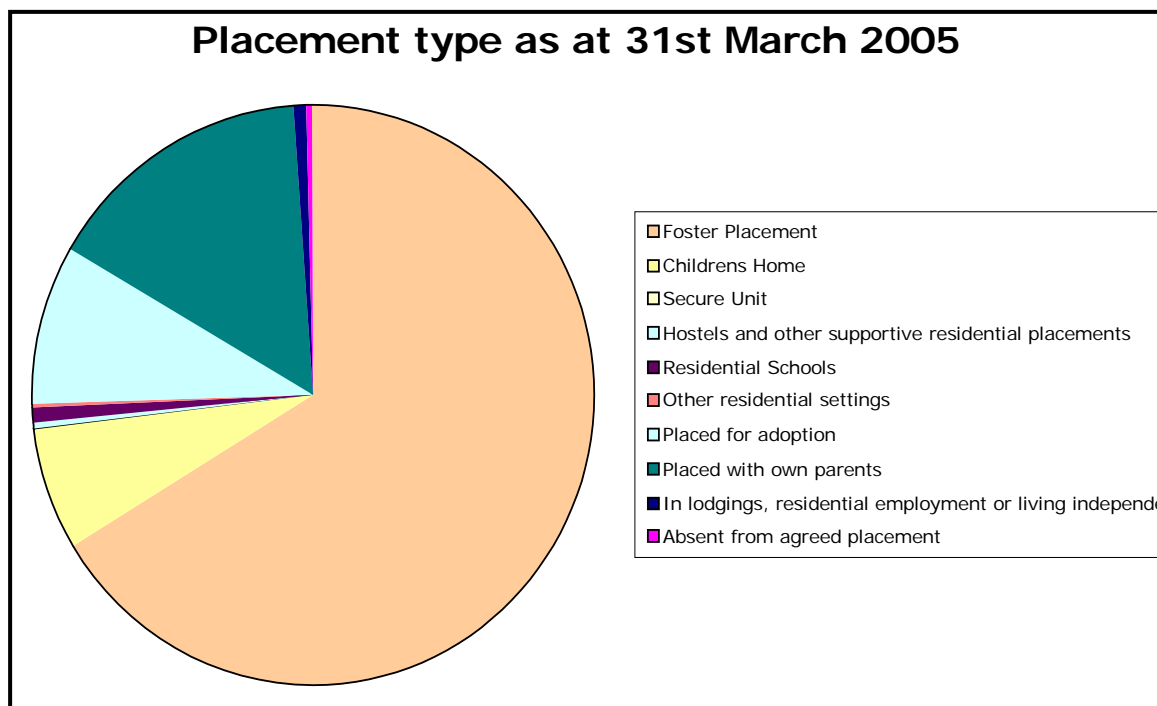
Age profile of Looked After Children in County Durham

5.11 The age profile for Looked After Children in County Durham immediately prior to the commencement of the scrutiny project was:

Age at 31st March 2005	Boys	Girls
Under 1	13	8
1 – 4	50	50
5 – 9	64	46
10 – 15	74	93
16 – 17	46	20
TOTAL	247	217

What Happens When a Child becomes Looked After?

5.12 When a young person becomes Looked After, one of the first things that needs to be decided is where the young person will live. Types of placements vary according to need and circumstances. At 31 March 2005, the majority of Looked After Children in County Durham were in foster care. The table below sets out the types of placements:



Scrutiny Guidance for Local Authorities - Checklist

5.13 During the course of the project the Local Government Association and Improvement and Development Agency issued guidance to local authorities about scrutinising the education of looked after children. Many of the issues outlined in the guidance had been or were being addressed by members of the Scrutiny Working Group, but in response to a scrutiny checklist of 30 questions, officers from Social Care and Health and Education provided the following information:

Menu of 30 Scrutiny Questions

How many children and young people are there in your authority overall?

There are 108900 children and young people growing up in County Durham in 2006 (Ref: Children and Young People's Plan).

How many looked after children do your local Children's and Young People's Services authority has lead responsibility for?

401 as at 31st March 2006

Are the numbers increasing?

No, they are steadily reducing

How many are disabled (as defined by disability legislation)?

15 as at 31st March 2006

What are their ethnicity, age and religion?

Ethnicity

Ethnic Origin of Children Looked After at 31st March 2006	
White	393
Mixed	5
Asian or Asian British	1
Other Ethnic Groups	2
	401

Age

Age of Children Looked After at 31st March 2006	
Under 1	20
1 – 4	77
5 – 9	104
10 – 15	144
16 – 17	56
	401

Religion

Religion of Children Looked After at 31st March 2006	
Agnostic	13
Anglican	2
Atheist	3
Christian Fellowship	4
Church of England	146
Church of Scotland	5
Methodist	4
Mormon	1
No religion	47
Protestant	7
Roman Catholic	20
Unknown	149
	401

How many have statements of special educational needs

68 young people have statements of special educational needs

What are the GCSE results for the last 3 years for those children who were eligible to take them and what are the predicted results next year?

See pages 35 and 36 of this report.

How many 16 year olds achieved other forms of qualifications or awards for achievement?

This information is currently not collated centrally. The final Transitional PEP for Year 11 leavers will be adapted to collect this information as of June 2006.

Is there a difference between the achievements of different groups of looked after children and young people who are looked after (In terms of ethnicity, circumstances such as asylum status, placement type or similar groupings).

There is evidence to indicate that boys in the looked after system underachieve and those in residential care also tend to perform less favourably to those in foster care. Children seeking asylum also underachieve in relation to their potential mainly due to disruption in their education, inability to speak and understand English to a sufficient level to access the curriculum and the timing of their entry into the country.

How many additional looked after children are placed in the local area by other Children's and Young People's Services Authorities? Are these numbers increasing or decreasing?

Approximately 200 at any time. Difficult to know whether they are increasing or decreasing as historical data not available

How many independent specialist residential schools are there in your authority if any?

None

Of the number of looked after children for whom the authority has a responsibility, how many:

Have an allocated school place to attend?

Have an allocated school place and do not attend?

Are awaiting a school place?

Arrangements are in place to ensure that no child goes missing from education as detailed in 'Ensuring Access to Education for children who are missing or at risk of going missing from Education.' On any one day the only looked after children not accessing education are those in transit and arrangements are in place to complete the transition as soon as possible. 5 are currently awaiting a school place

Of those awaiting a school place how long is the average wait?

The time scale from applying to a school to the start date can sometimes be extended if there are specific issues that need to be discussed to ensure

integration is successful. This would usually be discussed at a meeting arranged to identify specific support for the child to ensure s/he makes a successful transition. The Access Service strives to provide some educational support in place if a delay is inevitable. A policy is currently being written on Changing Schools to provide guidance and advice, which can be integrated into the Care Planning process for the child. This will be finished in the summer.

How many schools in the area have children and young people placed with them who are looked after? How many of them are high achieving schools in their own right?

There are 209 schools with looked after children on roll.

30 out of 36 secondary schools have looked after children and 5/30 of these schools are high achieving (i.e. more than the national average for 5A* to C GCSEs)

How many looked after children have been excluded for a fixed period and permanently in the past year and what is the exclusion period on average?

7 looked after children have been permanently excluded out of a total of 59 (12%)

84 looked after children were excluded for a fixed term and the average length of time was 4 days

Do you know how many are asked not to go into school informally and why?

The Education Key workers would be notified if children were unofficially excluded from school by the carers and/or social workers. Since September we have had 3 incidents brought to our attention involving Year 11 students, which have been successfully resolved with the schools concerned

How many truant regularly?

The percentage of looked after children who have missed at least 25 days of education for any reason in a school year has improved from 18.1% in 2002/3 to 14.7% in 2004/5.

How many have had to change schools as a result of being looked after?

This is difficult to quantify. It does happen on occasion but as far as possible all efforts are made to maintain children in their existing schools where possible. When children or young people are settled in permanent or long term placements they often change school to be nearer the foster home. A Changing Schools Policy is currently being written to help guide the Care Planning process and ensure education remains a high consideration.

How many have had three or more changes of school since being looked after?

This is incomplete, as we do not have a system that tracks all children including

out of county placements. The Education Database will only collect information on looked after children educated in Durham.

How often are social workers and adults responsible for the children expected to visit the children's homes? What is the performance against this expectation?

Social Workers have to visit at least once every 3 months (statutory requirement), but usually visit more often than this. Education Key Workers are expected to make minimum 6 weekly contacts with children and their carers. However many children are receiving additional support from the workers and therefore contact may then be on a weekly basis

Other information currently unavailable

What types of direct support are children receiving at school?

The children and young people receive support as necessary from the Access Service as well as provision specifically arranged by the school.

Schools have specific funding delegated to them for improving behaviour, improving attendance and individual special educational needs of all children including those that are looked after.

Children may also receive support from various support services e.g. CATS (Copelaw Activity Team) provide a range of outdoor activity experiences

How many hours out of school support (homework clubs, individual tutoring, additional holiday schools) have been provided to the looked after children in the last year?

From the Access Service 1910 hours have been offered out of school hours but no information is available from other sources

What systems are in place to monitor their attendance and achievements each day?

The residential staff and foster carers measure daily achievements when they ask how the children and young people have got on at school on that day. Schools also use a range of mechanisms to notify carers and parents of achievements including:

- Notes in Planners
- Certificates
- Phone Calls Home
- Reward charts

The Personal Education Plan is formally reviewed on a 12 weekly basis so progress against targets can be measured for each child.

Schools and the Education Welfare Service monitor attendance of the looked after children. EWS will notify the Access Service if a child has been absent for

10 days cumulative non-attendance and joint attempts will be made to address the issues causing the non-attendance.

How many children and young people have you got placed more than 20 miles from home or in another authority?

6% of children coming into the looked after system during 2005/6 were placed more than 20 miles from home

Approximately 10% of all looked after children and young people are placed outside County Durham, although most of these will be with Durham foster carers who live outside Durham. Nearly all of those are in neighbouring authorities.

What is the average unit cost of each out of authority placement and how does it compare to local provision (inclusive of on costs and overheads?)

Agency residential placements range in cost from £2,200 per week to over £4,000 per week

Agency foster placements are around £1,000 per week but vary between agencies

In house costs depend on what exactly is included in the calculation, but are generally less expensive than agency provision.

How many young people who are looked after are in higher education (university), further education or training?

The performance data on further and higher education is collected at age 19, i.e. at least 1 year after the young person has left care. There are currently 4 care leavers at University. The numbers in further education fluctuate

Is the data for all of the above available in respect of children who are living outside the CSA area?

The data covers all Durham looked after young people and care leavers, wherever they are living

If yes who monitors and provides the data and if no, why is it not available?

The Young People's Service provides data on care leavers, particularly the Connexions workers who are part of the service

Of the young people who left care three years ago how many are still in further education and how many are in employment?

This data is collected at age 19

What was the outcome of your assessment or joint area review and single conversation process?

The Annual Performance Assessment is currently being completed for 2006. Significant progress is being made on achieving at least 1A*-G but the target for 5 A*-C still is not being met.

Additional:

The number of temporary or agency staff and the turnover per annum

10 agency staff across the whole service (includes residential and secure services)

The number of foster carers and their annual turnover

Approximately 200

The number of specific training days focusing on looked after children that were provided for social workers, foster carers, named teachers and other work groups in the last year

28 days

The number of schools with dedicated access to specialist support from a looked after children team, and/or CAMHS

The Access Service is available to all schools

The number of foster carers with access to specialist support to assist them with the education of the children placed with them

The Access service is available to all foster carers

Who is involved in the Care of Looked After Children?

5.14 The Children Act, 1989 states – “The primary duty of a local authority is to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child who is looked after.” This also includes responsibility for the health of the child.

Social Services Provision

5.15 Social Services (now Children’s and Young People’s Services) provision in County Durham for Looked After Children was outlined to us by Gail Hopper, Acting Head of Children’s and Young People’s Services, and Meg Boustead, Strategic Manager, Children’s and Young People’s Services. The Strategy for the Service for 2004/06 is appended to this report, but provision broadly is as follows:

Residential – There are a number of small Children’s homes across County Durham who deliver services to meet complex needs

Fostering Service – This meets the needs of the vast majority of Looked After Children and covers a variety of needs. Foster carers are not paid for the work they do, but receive allowances. Some foster carers receive payment for skills, a

series of enhanced allowances reflecting their level of competence and experience and national minimum standards apply. They are trained and supported in their role.

Adoption Service – Durham has its own adoption agency. This is a regulated service. The Government’s preference is for adoption as it is seen as more permanent, but there are challenges in recruiting people who wish to adopt hard to place children.

Young People’s Service – This provides a service for care leavers. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 places responsibility on the local authority in relation to young people who have left care to maintain support. This applies until young people reach 21 years, although it can extend to 24 years of age. It deals with issues such as education, employment, training and housing and is a multi-agency service.

Secure Services – These are based at Aycliffe where 4 units provide places for up to 40 young people who need them. The Youth Justice Board contracts 30 places. Most young people resident at Aycliffe are from outside Durham. This provides a high level service for young people with extremely complex needs.

5.16 The numbers of staff employed in the Looked After Service in July 2005 were:

Residential	136
Fostering & Adoption	37
Young People’s Service	18
Looked After Social Workers	24

The Fostering Service

5.17 We heard at the beginning of the project about the support provided by the County Council to Looked After Children, including fostering. Fostering is looking after someone else’s child in the foster carer’s own home while the child’s parents or carers are unable to look after them. Usually, but not always, the child will return to their own home. Some children face a more uncertain future and may need a long-term or permanent home. Fostering is usually a temporary way of offering a child a home until they can go back to their own families. Adopting a child means that the adopters become their legal parents, with the same rights and responsibilities as if the young person was born to the adopters. When a person fosters a child, for whatever length of time, they are still caring for them on behalf of Social Services.

5.18 There are many different reasons why a child might need foster care, and there is no such thing as a typical foster child. Children usually need looking after because of problems at home such as:

- Parents having problems with drugs and alcohol
- There may have been a death, or divorce or illness in the family
- Family crisis, i.e. parents going into hospital
- Children who have been physically or sexually abused and been removed from their parents by the courts
- Relationship difficulties between children and parents

Who can become a Foster Carer?

- 5.19 Almost anyone can become a foster carer and most people have something to offer. People who have committed certain criminal offences (violence or offences against children, for example) obviously are not considered. Some people may rule themselves out of fostering, thinking they do not have the right background or experience. The fact is all sorts of people can foster, and there are very few practical restrictions. Foster carers can be married or unmarried, single, divorced, or widowed. They can be male or female, of any race or ethnic origin, employed or unemployed. Foster can foster whether they have children of their own, or not. It does not matter if a person owns their own home or lives in rented accommodation, as long as they have enough room. The important thing is that they have a caring and patient nature and the willingness to learn about the job they will be undertaking. Factors such as overall health and fitness are taken into account. Foster carers need not necessarily have been (or be) parents. They must however, have been a step parent or have some experience of caring for children, e.g. youth work, or childminding. Foster carers do not have to be married. They can be a couple living together, but must have lived together for a minimum of 3 years. Single people may also be considered.

Support

- 5.20 Fostering is a partnership between the foster carer, the Council and the child and their family. It is a demanding role. The Council provides support in a number of ways, not just financially and materially, but also by visiting regularly, providing advice and guidance by telephone and in person, and generally keeping involved. When someone is approved as a carer, they will be assigned a social worker who will act as their personal Fostering Officer. Their role is to support the foster carer through each fostering placement and they will visit carers regularly. They are always available by telephone should carers need advice during the day. If a difficult situation arises outside of office hours, carers can ring the emergency duty team.
- 5.21 Every child who is Looked After has their own social worker who is responsible for managing their care plan. This social worker will visit the child being fostered, and will also be there to offer foster carers help. Both the child's social worker and the Fostering Officer can gain access to other sources of specialist support for foster carers and the child, such as an education or health specialists. All children in care are given a high priority by the Council's partner agencies.

Training

- 5.22 Every foster carer undertakes pre-approval training during the assessment process. This is designed to give carers a realistic idea of what's involved, and to introduce them to the knowledge and skills required to care for children with different needs. Once people start fostering they are given the opportunity to attend further training to help develop their skills and enhance their ability to care for children. Some courses concentrate on specific areas such as managing difficult behaviour, other training will deal with more wide-ranging topics. Some carers may wish to work towards achieving a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in childcare.

Foster Carer Support Groups

- 5.23 Many foster carers find it useful to share their experiences with other carers. It can be a real help to meet other people who have been through similar situations, and who appreciate and share the same feelings. The Council has set up numerous support groups which run on a monthly basis throughout the county, so carers are sure to find one reasonably close to their home. Durham County Council is a member of Fostering Network, a national organisation that acts as an independent voice for carers, and represents their interests at both a national and local level. In addition, through Fostering Network our foster carers have access to an advice and mediation worker.

Children's groups and activities

- 5.24 All young people in foster or residential care have the opportunity to get together and enjoy a wide range of activities. They include holiday programmes, trips to the Metro Centre and events like the Christmas Pantomime, all a chance for children to have fun and make friends - and for their foster carers to have a break. There is a leisure card giving young people, their carers and their own children free entry to swimming pools and leisure centres. Organisations such as Care in Durham also play a valuable role.

Financial support

- 5.25 Foster carers receive an allowance to cover the every day expenditure that caring for a child involves. The Council pays an allowance for each child plus extra payments to cover special occasions such as Christmas and holidays. Foster carers may also receive an additional payment to recognise their skills as a carer. This varies depending on the particular level of knowledge and experience. The Council realises that some people make fostering their career and can progress and develop their skills and gain a higher rate of payment as they acquire more expertise. This is called the Council's 'Payment for Skills' scheme. If carers already have relevant skills or qualifications when they are approved as foster carers, they may receive this payment immediately.

Equipment

- 5.26 As well as the payments above, the Council supplies foster carers with any extra equipment they might need, such as buggies, beds, safety gates or bed linen, or provide the funds for carers to buy them.

Looked After Children

- 5.27 A large percentage of the children in foster care are over the age of 11. The County Council needs foster carers who are keen to work with older children and teenagers. These children can often be more difficult to look after but can be very rewarding to care for. When children are being looked after short term only, contact with the family is crucial. The foster carer(s) play an important part in keeping in touch with the family. Sometimes it is necessary for brothers and sisters of the same family to be looked after at the same time. It is usually better for the children to remain together and continue to live as a family.

What happens to Children after Fostering?

- 5.28 This depends on the reason the children need looking after. Most children return home, but if family problems cannot be sorted out, they may remain with foster carers for many months or even years. By the time a child has been looked after for 4 months he/she has to have a plan about where they are going to grow up. For most younger children and some older ones, this plan will be for them to be adopted. In these cases foster carers have a vital role to play in helping the child settle into their new adoptive family.

Children's Residential Homes

- 5.29 As at May 2006, Durham has 11 children's homes, (plus 1 emergency overnight stay home run by the Emergency Duty Team and a residential respite unit run by Children with Disability services). There is also a separate secure unit on Aycliffe site.
- 5.30 The 11 children's homes are located across the county - 4 are on Aycliffe site, accommodating 3-4 children each age 11-18. The other homes are in Bishop Auckland (High Etherley), Spennymoor (Moorside) Coxhoe, Stanley (Catchgate), Tow Law, West Rainton and Framwellgate Moor. Catchgate takes emergency short-term placements and works with the families to return children home. Moorside is a residential respite unit that supports families to keep young people at home and prevent long term admission to the looked after system. The homes each cater for 2-5 young people age 11 to 18
- 5.31 Each home has a Registered Homes Manager responsible for a staff team including qualified and non-qualified staff. All staff are expected to work towards and achieve NVQ3. Every young person has a key worker within the home.
- 5.32 Each home has identified and education link worker. The education link workers meet with the Access service to co-ordinate education support across the homes.

The Role of the Social Worker

- 5.33 Initially, looked after children will have a Social Workers from one of the 12 Children in Need Teams throughout County Durham.
- 5.34 For those children and young people who will remain Looked After (i.e. not be returning home or moving on to adoption) responsibility for their welfare passes to the Looked After Social Work Teams. There are 2 Looked After Teams, based at Aycliffe (for the south of County Durham) and at Hopper House, Durham (serving the north of the County). The Social Worker is responsible for carrying out an assessment and for developing and implementing the Care Plan and ensuring that the child's needs are met.
- 5.35 Improving education achievement of Looked After Children is one of the key priorities of the looked after social work service and this is being taken forward through a number of actions including increased involvement of social workers in Personal Education Plans.

The Role of the Council as Corporate Parent

History and Background

5.36 Corporate Parenting was first described in the Children Act 1989 and more recently has been in accordance with the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000. The history and context of the role of local authorities as Corporate Parents has been shaped by a number of reports/circulars in recent years including:-

Sir William Utting – ‘People Like Us’, 1997.

Frank Dobson - ‘Letter to Councillors about their roles and responsibilities’, September, 1998.

‘The Death of Victoria Climbié’ – Sir Herbert Laming’s report, January 2003.

The Corporate Parent Role

5.37 The role of the Council as a Corporate Parent for Looked After Children is to:-

Provide care, a home and access to health and education
Celebrate and share achievements
Be ambitious for them.

5.38 In Frank Dobson’s letter to Councillors (September 1998), he said “**For children who are looked after, your Council has a legal and moral duty to try and provide the kind of loyal support that any good parent would give to their children.**”

This means that members collectively are responsible for:-

- Asking ‘What is happening to our Looked After children?’
- Considering ‘Would this be good enough for my child?’
- Acting ‘How can the lives and outcomes for our Looked After Children be improved.’

5.39 The Council’s Corporate Parent role embodies three levels of responsibility:-

- **Universal** - This applies to all members and includes awareness of the Corporate Parenting role, knowledge of the profile and needs of Looked After children in County Durham, and an understanding of the impact of Council decisions on Looked After children, information about the quality of care and

services provided and questioning whether these would be good enough for their own children

- **Targeted** – Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel
- **Specialists** – Lead member roles.

The Corporate Parenting Panel in Action

5.40 Members of the Scrutiny Working Group attended a meeting of the Council's Corporate Parenting Panel in March 2006 to observe the proceedings and to have a discussion with the Panel members about their role. Gail Hopper, then Acting Head of Children's and Young People's Services, explained that the Corporate Parenting Panel was set up in 2001, at the time when the constitution of the County Council was last revised. This area of work had previously been undertaken by the Regulation 22 (Children's Act) Committee. The role of the Panel has been the subject of previous reports to Cabinet. The remit of the Panel currently includes:

- Young people in residential care
- Children and Young People in foster care
- Children placed for adoption
- Young people who are care leavers
- Education of children and young people in public care
- Health needs of children and young people in public care
- Offending of children looked after
- Children in Need of protection
- Aycliffe Secure Services
- Young people in custody

5.41 Members of the Panel receive information about the quality of children's residential services and undertake visits to the 17 registered children's homes (including secure homes) in County Durham to assess and then make reports on their findings from which time limited action plans are drawn up. These are usually unannounced, take place when young people are present, and are designed to:

- Hear the views of young people who reside in homes and the staff who care for them
- Examine how young people's needs are being met
- Monitor and assess the quality and care of services being delivered

5.42 The Panel meets every month and holds officers to account for the services provided. The Panel also receives reports from time to time about issues such as the education and health of Looked After Children. Panel Members are Councillors who volunteer and undertake training before making visits. There are some co-opted members. New Councillors are always welcomed. The systematic arrangements for visits were recognised in the Commission for Social Care Inspection Children's Inspection in Durham in January 2005.

Issues

- 5.43 The Corporate Parenting Panel was said to have a quality assurance and monitoring role. The Working Group heard that it does this by having the opportunity to report to Cabinet about any issues which arise (which in turn could be subject to scrutiny). However, currently there is no codification of the role or responsibilities of the Panel in the Council's Constitution and this is an issue which it was recognised requires to be addressed.
- 5.44 As part of the scrutiny project, consultation was undertaken with Looked After Children and Care Leavers, as well as carers. A number of further issues in relation to the role and operation of the Corporate Parenting Panel were raised during the consultation and these are highlighted in the relevant sections on consultation in this report.

Performance Criteria and Targets for Looked After Children Services

- 5.45 The provision of services to Looked After Children is subject to various schemes of regulation including:
- The Care Standards Act, 2000
 - National Minimum Standards
 - Inspection and External Scrutiny
 - Registration & De-registration
- 5.46 Inspections are undertaken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (soon to be merged with Ofsted) and the most recent inspections have been very favourable. There are also a number of Best Value, or Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) Performance Indicators which are relevant.

Section Six – The Importance of Education for Looked After Children: Performance in County Durham

Introduction

- 6.1 The Children's Act 2004 requires that relevant local authorities must promote the educational attainment of Looked after Children.
- 6.2 The Education Bill, published on 28th February 2006 will place a duty on local authorities to promote high standards and the fulfilment of every child's educational potential; to identify children missing from school and seek to reduce truancy; provide support more quickly when young people are excluded; and to promote choice and diversity. This includes ensuring all schools have expert advice on how to support pupils facing particular challenges, including those from black and ethnic minorities, disabled children, looked after children and those with special educational needs.

Why we need to Improve

- 6.3 Looked After Children have the same ability range as other children, but have higher incidences of special educational needs, yet despite this there is still a massive achievement gap between the looked after population and general population at all key educational stages. As part of the evidence gathering for the scrutiny project, members attended a national conference to consider these issues in London on 27 March 2006.
- 6.4 Members heard that a Social Exclusion Unit Report in 2003 highlighted the barriers to achievement of Looked After Children as:

- Too much time out of school
- Lives characterised by instability
- Insufficient help with their education if they get behind
- Primary carers not equipped or expected to provide sufficient support for learning and development (some carers have previous poor experiences of school themselves)
- Unmet emotional, physical and mental health needs that impact on Looked After Children's education.

- 6.5 Too often there are low expectations for what Looked After Children can achieve. The starting point should be high expectations and Looked After Children need more than just equality of opportunity – extraordinary efforts should be made to support them in learning. For instance, in Hampshire, all Head Teachers are required to notify Educational Achievement staff if any Looked After Children are not entered for SATs or GCSE exams and the reasons why this has occurred.



The Government's View

6.6 Maria Eagle M.P., Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children, Young People and Families, highlighted the following issues in her address to the national conference:

- Only 50% of Looked After Children gain 1 GCSE, compared with 96% of children generally
- Only 5% of Looked After Children go on to Higher Education
- 25-30% of Looked After Children end up in custody at some point
- A large % of Looked After Children end up as rough sleepers
- Young people who gain at least one GCSE have much better outcomes in terms of employment and social inclusion
- Only 59% of Looked After Children are entered for GCSEs
- Many Looked After Children go to the worst, not the best schools – only 3% of Looked After Children are in the top 25% of schools and 42% are in the bottom 25% of schools
- Looked After Children are 10 times more likely to be permanently excluded from school
- To be effective, intervention must take place as early as possible
- Special education needs and moving schools regularly are the 2 most significant factors impacting on the educational attainment of Looked After Children and worst of all is moving school at Year 10.
- High demands/expectations of corporate parents/carers play a role in driving up educational achievement of Looked After Children.
- The Government will be setting targets for placement stability
- Many foster carers have poor educational attainment
- There are 4 main groups with different needs:
 - 0-4 years
 - 5-10 years
 - 11 plus
 - Those with more than 1 care episode

- 6.7 The Minister stressed the point that, despite increased support from Government, there was little sign that the gap in educational achievement of Looked After Children and young people generally was narrowing. There was an expectation from Government that, given the resources being devoted to Looked After Children (£1.9bn), the gap in educational achievement should be narrowing significantly.
- 6.8 As corporate parent, those authorities with Looked After Children responsibilities (and their members individually) should have no different expectation of the young people cared for, than any parent would have of their own children. Young people should be appropriately supported and equipped to perform well in their exams and, where appropriate, should be praised and rewarded when they do so.

Educational Attainment of Looked After Children in County Durham

- 6.9 Maureen Clare (Head of Access and Inclusion, Education) told the Working Group about the support provided by the County Council for the educational achievement of Looked After Children. The County Council has had a Policy for the Education of Children in Public Care since 2001 updated and agreed by Cabinet in November 2005 (see Appendix 3). Cabinet also agreed a Strategic Development Plan for these issues in 2002.

Statutory Targets for Educational Attainment

- 6.10 There are a number of statutory targets for education. In December 2004 the Government set revised Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets and performance indicators to narrow the gap in educational achievement between looked after children and their peers and improve their educational support and the stability of their lives. These were to improve absolute performance and narrow the gap between the performance of looked after children and that of their peers on the following measures:
- Percentage of children aged 11, looked after for at least 12 months, who obtain level 4 in Key Stage 2 English and Maths
 - Percentage of young people looked after for at least 12 months who reach school leaving age without having sat a GCSE equivalent exam
 - Percentage of young people looked after for at least 12 months and in Year 11 who achieve 5 or more GCSEs graded A*-C or equivalent
 - Participation of care leavers aged 19 in education, employment or training
- 6.11 By 2006 the targets were that:
- Outcomes for 11 year olds in English and Maths should be at least 60% as good as those of their peers.
 - The proportion who become disengaged from education is reduced so that no more than 10% reach school leaving age without having sat a GCSE

equivalent exam (i.e. 90% are entered for and were present for at least one A*-G).

- The proportion of those aged 16 who gets qualifications equivalent to 5 GCSEs graded A*-C to increase by 4% points each year since 2002 (18.56% for Durham LEA).

Performance and Progress on Targets for Educational Attainments

- 6.12 Local targets are set towards achieving these statutory targets. Members heard from Maureen Clare that good progress was being made in respect of Year 11 pupils achieving one or more GCSEs A*-G, but the target for achieving 5 or more GCSEs at A*-C was proving to be the most difficult.
- 6.13 The size of the cohort and the proportion with Special Educational Needs varies year on year and only those who have been looked after for a specified 12 month period can be included in the reported statistics. In 2005 41 Year 11 children were looked after at the time they sat their GCSE examinations of which 30 were eligible for inclusion in the statutory return.
- 6.14 Members of the Working Group were provided with the following information about comparative performance in 2003/04. The OC2 return is the statutory return which local authorities responsible for looked after children are required to make to Government. Only Looked After Children who have been continuously in care for 12 months are shown on the OC2 return.

LEA	2003/4 Performance reported in OC2 return(%)							
	No of looked after children old enough to sit GCSE or GNVQ examinations	% who sat one of these exams	1 A*-G %		5 A*-G %		5 A*-C %	
			Looked after	All children	Looked after	All children	Looked after	All children
Durham	45	74	51	96	47	87	9.3	47
Darlington	5	0	0	96	0	89	-	49
Northumberland	20	50	50	96	32	92	-	56
Gateshead	15	87	87	96	80	89	-	62
Middlesbrough	15	46	46	92	0	83	0	41
Stockton	15	60	60	96	40	89	0	46
Wakefield	35	71	62	97	44	91	-	50
South Tyneside	20	85	85	95	30	87	-	45
Wirral	40	53	53	96	35	90	15	54
Hull	45	79	74	91	56	78	-	34
Derbyshire	45	84	84	97	60	92	16	54
NORTH EAST	230	68	61	95	42	88	9	49

2004/05 Results

6.15 Educational performance of Looked After Children improved in the cohort for 2004/05 as follows:

- 41 Year 11 children were looked after at the time they sat their GCSE examinations
- 30 young people in the cohort were eligible for the statutory (OC2) return (Looked After for a continuous period of more than 1 year)
- Length of time in care ranged from 3 months to 15 years with an average of 5 years
- 51% in foster care, 34% children's homes, 12% with a parent/relative and 3% in other

6.16 An analysis of this cohort of Year 11 Looked After Children revealed that:

- The number of school moves at secondary education ranged from 0 to 6 times
- 5 young people had experienced permanent exclusion during their secondary school career
- Days of exclusion varied from 2 to 76 days with an average of 20.5 days per student
- 12 young people were not excluded at any time
7 young people not entered for GCSEs
- Young people in foster care achieved more than those in residential care
- 63% of Year 11 students received support from the Access Service

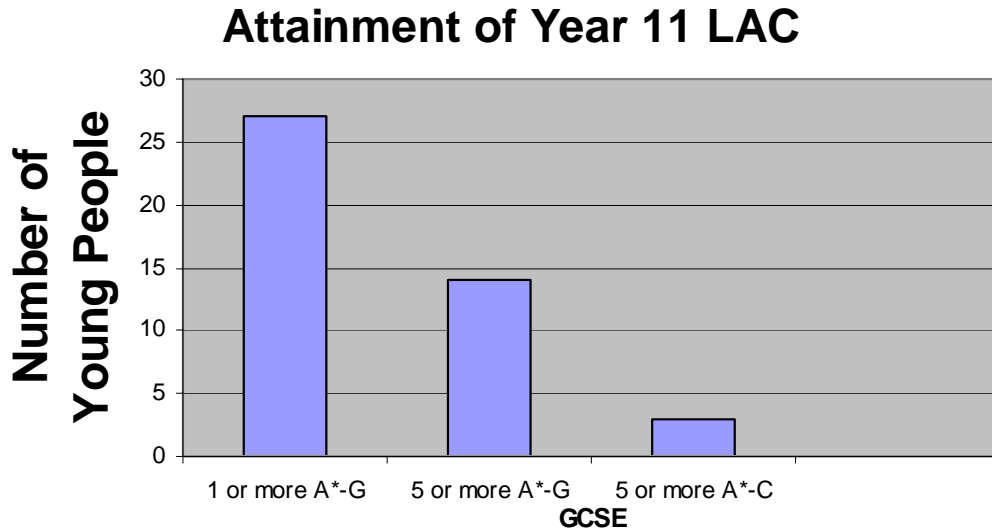
Year 11 Attainment in 2004/05

6.17 Attainment of all Looked After Children in 2004/05 was as follows. The figures for the reporting cohort (OC2) are identified separately:

Target	Cohort	Result	Variance
% young people achieving 1 or more GCSE A*-G	All	78.1%	+8.1%
	Reporting cohort	73.3%	+3.3%
% young people achieving 5 or more GCSEs A*-G	All	41.5%	-15.5% (6 young people)
	Reporting Cohort	43.3%	-13.7% (4 young people)
% achieving 5 or more GCSE A*-C	All	7.3%	-7.3% (3 young people)
	Reporting Cohort	6.6%	-8% (3 young people)
% entered and sat GCSE examination	All	81%	+1%
	Reporting Cohort	77%	-3% (1 young person)

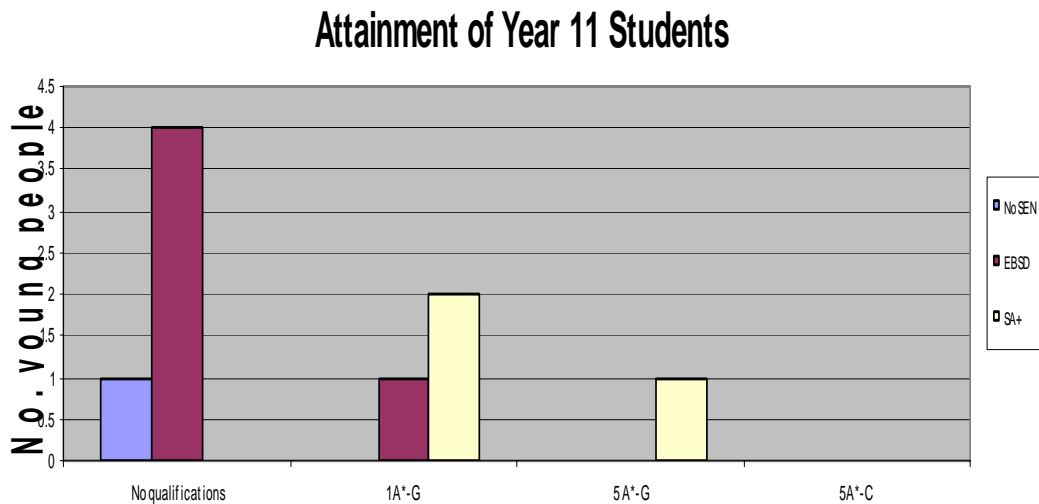
Year 11 Mainstream School Data

6.18 There were 27 young people in mainstream school in 2004/05 including 5 out of county placements. All 27 students achieved GCSE accreditation as shown below:



Year 11 Other Provision Data

6.19 There were 6 young people attending special school in 2004/05. 2 young people achieved 5 or more A*-G GCSEs. 4 obtained no formal qualifications. There were 8 students in alternative educational provision.

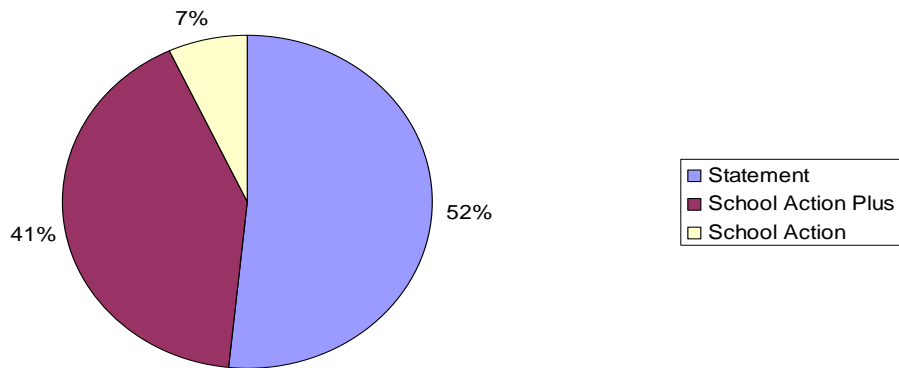


Special Educational Needs

6.20 There were 27 young people in the Year 11 Looked After Children cohort with Special Educational Needs. Of these, 13 had Statements – 3 had moderate learning difficulties, 11 had emotional, behavioural and social difficulties and 1

had severe learning difficulties. The breakdown of needs was as follows:

Breakdown of SEN for Year 11 LAC

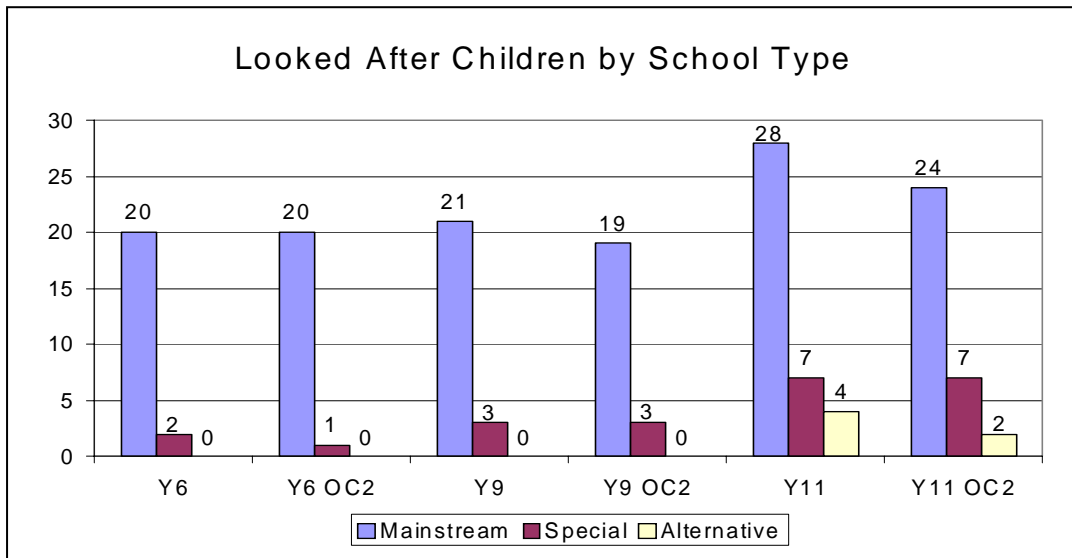


2005/06 Mid Academic Year Data

6.21 At a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel in March 2006, members received the following mid academic year data from Jane le Sage, Access Service Manager:

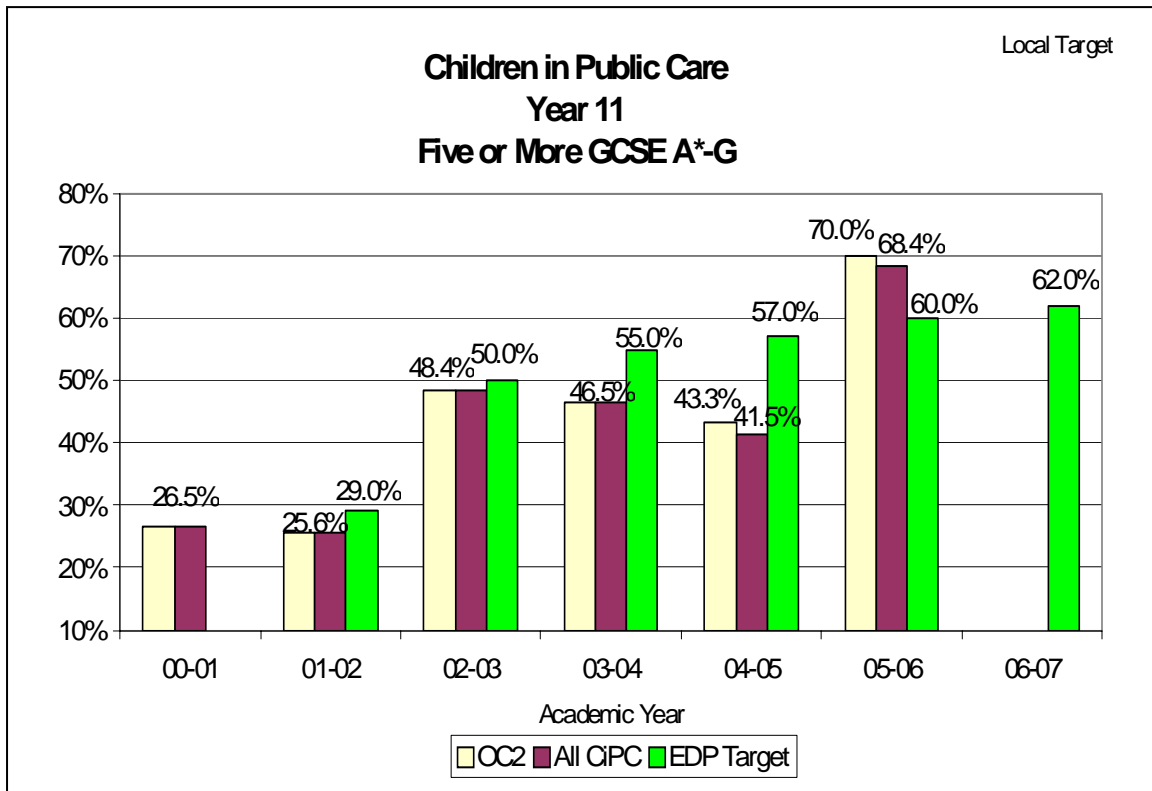
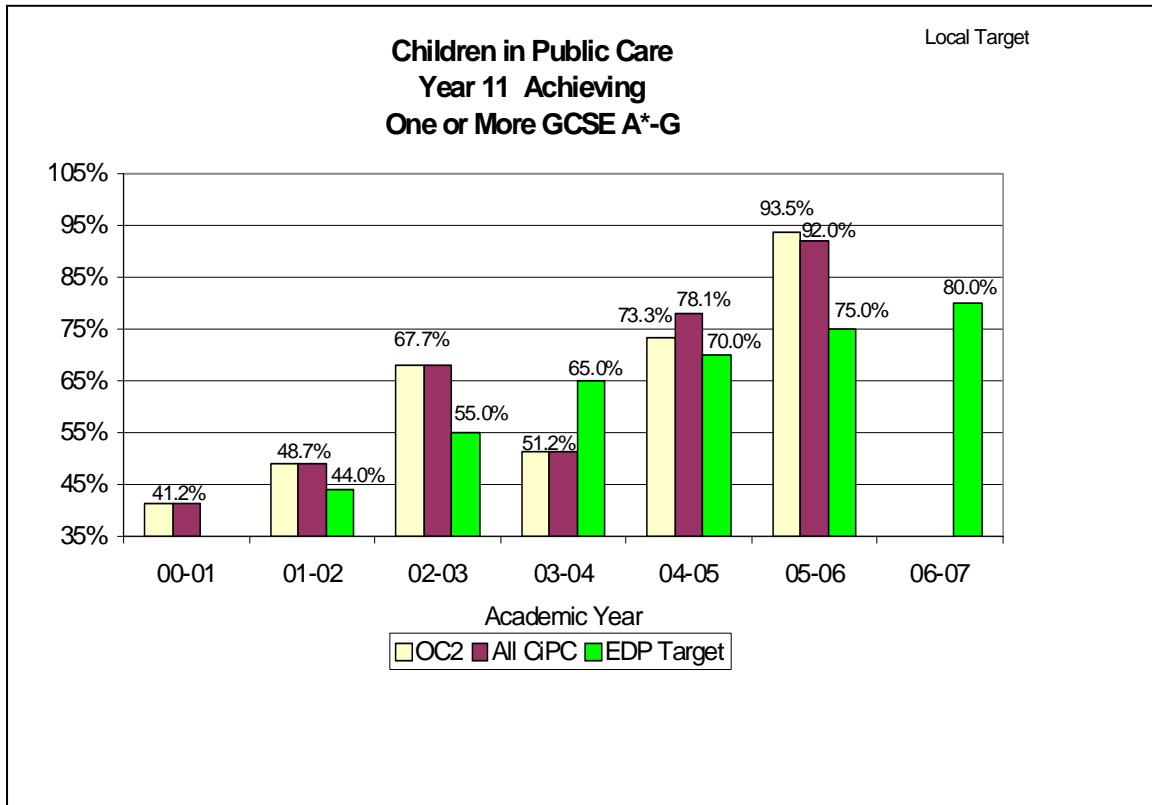
Number of Children looked After by Year Group

R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11
18	14	15	24	16	23	22	24	18	24	26	39

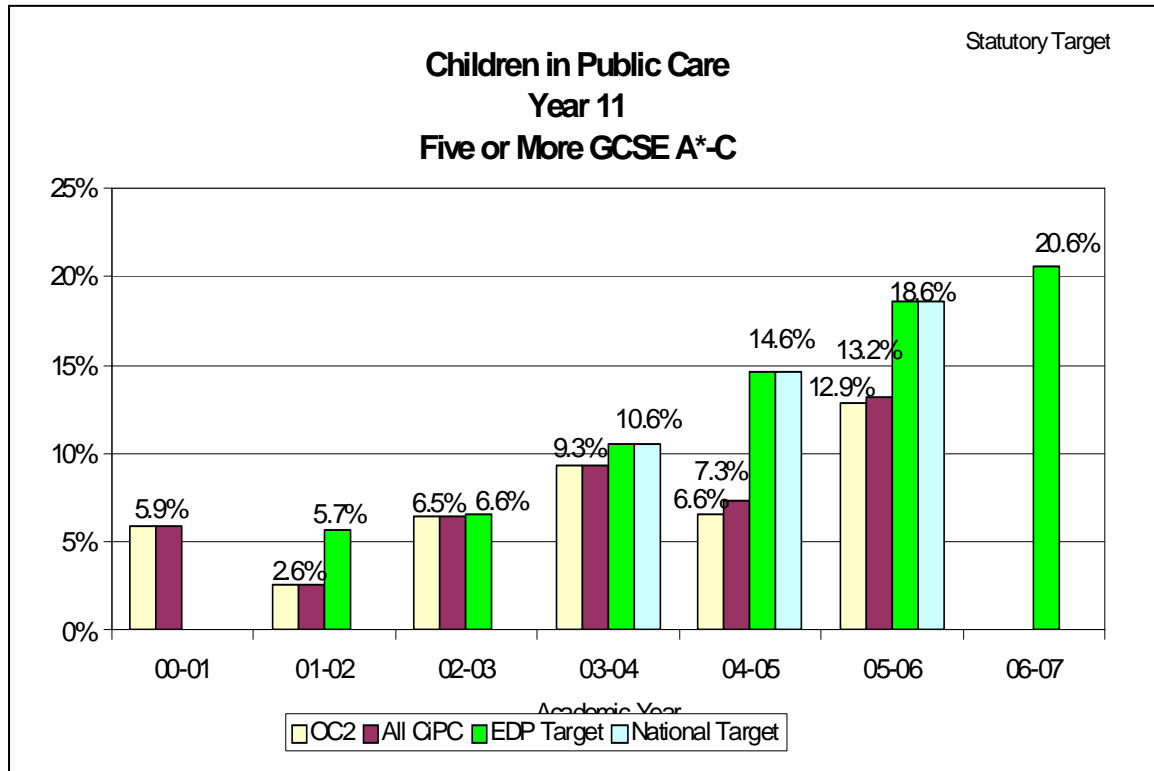


Data shows numbers of young people and by Year Group (i.e. Y6)

Year 11 GCSE Results and Predicted Grades for 2005/06



Year 11 GCSE Results and Predicted Grades for 2005/06



Findings

6.22 The educational attainment of Looked After Children in County Durham is improving, particularly in relation to 1 or more GCSEs at A* to G, but not to the target levels set by Government in relation to 5 or more GCSEs. There are however, a number of factors which impact on the results:

- The small numbers in each Year 11 cohort – typically between 35-40 young people per academic year. This can mean that a small number of young people either doing worse (or better) in exams can have a statistically large impact on performance figures.
- The numbers of young people in the Year 11 cohort with Special Educational Needs and/or particularly challenging types of behaviour. Sadly, there may always be a small number of young people who cannot achieve in academic terms.
- For those who cannot achieve academically, having vocational pathways to enable them to acquire other skills is equally important.

Section Seven – Factors Influencing the Educational Attainment of Looked After Children

Background

7.1 At the commencement of the scrutiny investigation, Members heard that there were a broad range of factors which influenced the ability of looked after children to achieve well educationally. A view was taken that a holistic approach needed to be taken in conducting the project and that the following issues should also be examined:

- The mental and emotional health of looked after children
- Physical health issues



Mental and Emotional Health Issues

7.2 Mark Cain, Strategy and Commissioning Manager and Jo Dawson, General Manager, for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services outlined to Members of the Working Group the main issues associated with the mental health of Looked After Children as follows:

- Attachment, post trauma/abuse, emotional problems
- Complexity of presentation (which requires a multi-disciplinary input)
- Young people who are more likely to present in crisis
- A possible increased likelihood of deliberate self harm, conduct disorders, offending behaviour and substance misuse
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (in a small number of cases)

Trauma

7.3 Jan Edwards from the STEPS Therapeutic Service told the Working Group that many Looked After Children suffer from trauma. A traumatic stress response is the automatic response which can overwhelm an individual's physical body and emotions in ways that are uncontrollable. The impacts can be experienced in many ways. For Looked After Children the resultant separation and loss when they are taken into care can be viewed as traumatic.

How Does Trauma Present?

7.4 There are a number of ways in which trauma can exhibit in those affected by it. These may be linked and/or impact on each other:

- **Re-enactment** – Visualisation and flashbacks, triggering of memories
- **Avoidance** – Of people, places, dissociation problems, deletion or limited memory
- **Hyperarousal** – Being startled, nightmares, interrupted sleep, irritability and distractibility

7.5 Mark told the Working Group that the context for the support provided to Looked After Children is contained in Standard 9 of the Department of Health National Service Framework for Children which relates to the mental health and psychological well being of all children and young people. Standard 9 requires that:

- **All Children and Young People from birth to their 18th birthday who have mental health problems and disorders have access to timely integrated, high quality, multi-disciplinary mental health services to ensure effective assessment, treatment & support for them and their families**
- **The delivery of a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) by December 2006**

7.6 Another determinant of provision for Looked After Children is "Every Child Matters: Change for Children" the Green Paper which preceded the Children Act 2004. Every Child Matters set out five outcomes for children:

- Be Healthy
- Stay Safe
- Enjoy & Achieve
- Make a Positive Contribution
- Achieve Economic Well Being

7.7 Common themes in the Green paper were:

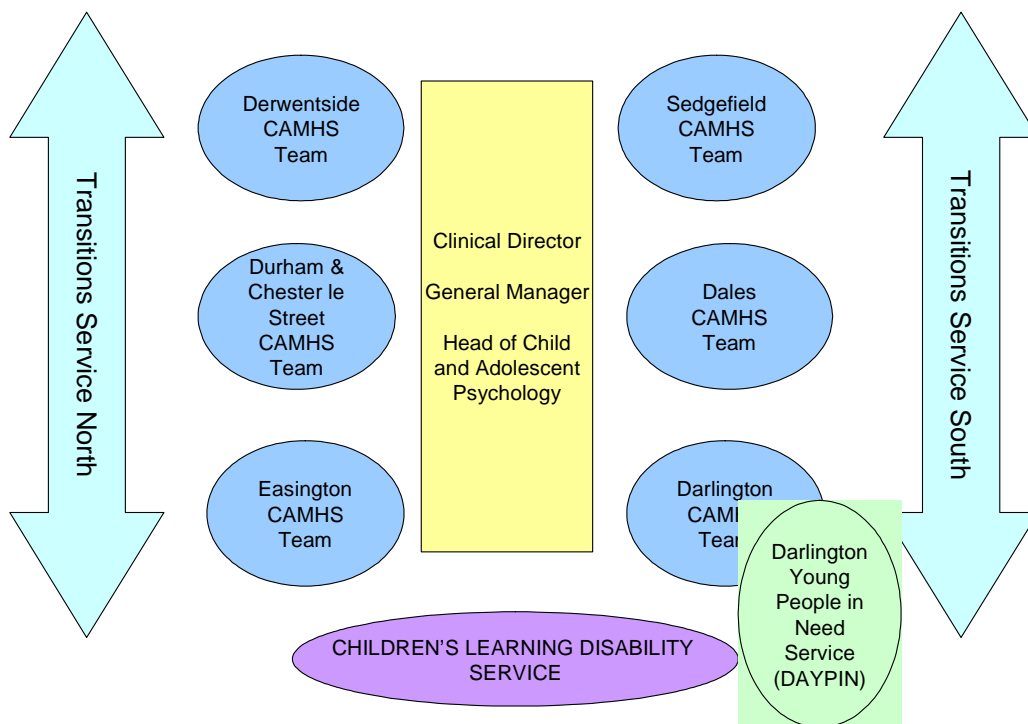
- Emotional well-being
- Promotion of self esteem/positive mental health
- Focus upon prevention and early intervention

7.8 In County Durham and Darlington, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Strategy implementation commenced in November 2000. Key Priorities for Service Development included:

- Provision of Specialist Mental Health Services to Children and Young People in the Looked After System
- Implementation of a CAMHS Learning & Development Strategy
- Improvement of the interface between Primary Care (Universal Services) & CAMHS (Targeted & Specialist Provision)
- Supporting the development of joint practice in Education settings that promote emotional/mental health well being of children & young people
- Provision of Mental Health Services to Young People -16 & 17 year olds
- Emergency/24 Service Provision

CAMHS Provision

7.9 CAMHS in County Durham (and Darlington) is organised as follows:

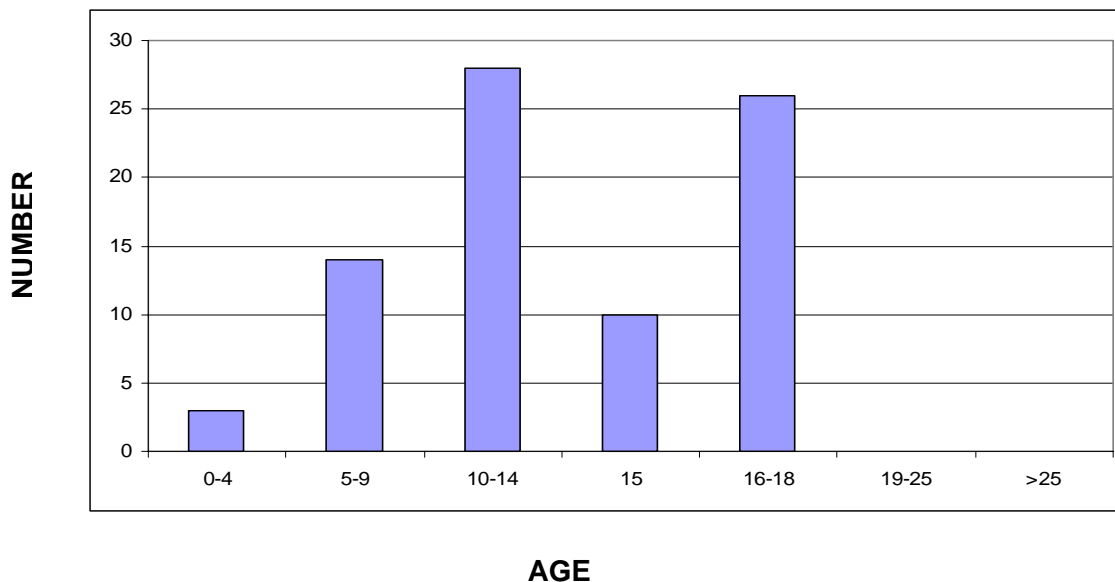


7.10 CAMHS provides:

- Specialist input to young people and their carers to support and resolve (where possible) mental health issues
- Multi-disciplinary input as required

What is CAMHS Doing to Support Looked After Children?

7.11 A recent age profile of Looked After Children in contact with CAMHS, based on CAMHS mapping information (snapshot) was:



Progress made in CAMHS Provision

7.12 The following progress is being made in CAMHS provision:

- Appointment of a Looked After Children/CAMHS Co-ordinator (time limited)
- Establishment of a Looked After Children/CAMHS Steering Group (on-going)
- Completion of needs assessment re current provision of service
- Engaging Children & Young people in the Looked After system re experience of using services
- Establishment of Resource Directory "Stressed Out" Web site
- Identifying training needs for Foster Carers & Professionals working with LAC
- CAMHS/LAC Therapeutic Social Workers providing support
- CAMHS Foundation Training
- CAMHS Module (University of Teesside)
- Improving Access to services
- Identified CAMHS Locality Team link
- Implementation of LAC/CAMHS Therapeutic Social Workers x 3 wte
- Increased capacity in STEPS Team x 2 wte
- Proposals for an Integrated Model of Service

Current Position in CAMHS

7.13 There are Therapeutic Looked After Children Social Workers in 2 of the CAMHS teams with a vacant post in another. Over 81 looked After Children received services from CAMHS in November 2005.

Emotional Support provided to Looked After Children by STEPS

- 7.14 Scrutiny Members heard previously about the support provided by STEPS to young people suffering from trauma during the “Minding the Gap” scrutiny project which looked at mental health provision for young people aged 16-25 (the so called “transitional age group”). One of the recommendations of the Minding the Gap scrutiny project was that the value of the STEPS service in supporting young people who have suffered trauma (as many Looked After Children have) needed to be recognised and staffing levels in that Service should be monitored and maintained.

What is STEPS?

- 7.15 STEPS provide a County-wide therapeutic service to children, young people and their families/carers where there has been a “significant trauma”. The STEPS Service was established in 1995 (prior to the establishment of Children’s and Young People’s Services) and was a specialist service branch of Children and Young People’s Services in Durham County Council’s Social Care and Health Service. The Service operates from Newton Aycliffe and has 9.5 Social Work posts and 1 Team Manager (inclusive of 1.5 growth in 2001/2002 funded by the Mental Health Grant for Looked After Children). There are some vacancies at present, pending a review of service provision.
- 7.16 The staff in STEPS are experienced social workers with additional training, many of whom have gone on to develop specific therapeutic approaches such as play therapy and family therapy. The Service has therapeutic rooms equipped for play and working with young people, but it also works in the community - in schools, homes, and nurseries, at family centres and with CAMHS as appropriate.
- 7.17 STEPS will assess conditions and undertake therapeutic work where necessary. It works intensively, direct with young people, usually through weekly sessions, as well as working closely with key adults in the young person’s life such as parents, carers and schools. STEPS works across agencies (i.e. CAMHS), undertakes case consultation, provides training (i.e. for foster carers and adopters), does permanency preparation and planning and undertakes post-adoption work.
- 7.18 STEPS provide support to young people aged 3-21 years of age (and if appropriate, up to 24, following the Leaving Care Act 2000). In the year ending December 2005, STEPS worked with 108 children of whom 69 (64%) were Looked After. The approach adopted by STEPS in working with young people is holistic, child focused, about building relationships, requires careful set-up and planning and is designed to be non-stigmatising. It focuses on child development and attachment and applies a therapeutic approach (using play therapy, art, drama, music, family work/therapy, solution focused therapy, etc.) The process is subject to rigorous review and evaluation.

How do Young People Access STEPS?

- 7.19 Young people are referred to the STEPS Service by Social Workers or social Work Assistants based in Locality Children in Need Teams or Looked After

Teams. The maximum waiting time for a young person to be seen is 13 weeks, consistent with Durham and Darlington Priority Service Trust guidelines, although this target is not always met.

Case Study

- 7.20 The following case study was presented to the Working Group as an example of some of the work carried out by the STEPS Service with Looked After Children. Names have been anonymised:

Adam (aged 6) Preparation for permanency via adoption

Adam's parents were drug users and he had suffered emotional abuse, neglect and physical abuse.

Adam was offered play therapy sessions to support transition into adoptive placement.

Observation sessions in the school were conducted and practical strategies were provided to assist the teacher to manage Adam's behaviour.

Outcomes:

- **Adam's concentration levels improved and he was able to make friends**
- **A cumulative effect of improving his confidence, esteem and sense of efficacy (ability to achieve and be competent).**
- **Adoptive placement considered successful.**

Physical Health Issues

- 7.21 The County Council, as a corporate parent, has a statutory responsibility in relation to young people's physical health and there are a number of requirements and performance indicators which govern this area.
- 7.22 Jane Scott, the Senior Nurse for Looked After Children and Young People for North Durham provided an overview of the work undertaken by the looked after nurses. She explained that she is based within the Vulnerable Children Team at Chester-le-Street which allows for close working with the Child Protection Team and means that there is no longer any need for dual registration of young people and Looked After issues can be picked up quickly. When she took up her position in 2002 it was a newly created post and consequently there was no caseload. She explained that there had not been a nurse for the Easington area for some time, however it was expected that this post would be filled by the end of April 2006.

- 7.23 Jane had worked extensively on the care planning procedure, which meant that all Looked After Children had care planning meetings particularly at transition times. The medical procedures that were in place for health checks on young people in care had been amended in response to young people's views submitted at focus group meetings. Whilst the County Council had a statutory duty to offer a medical to Looked After Children annually, young people could refuse if they wished. Young people in the focus groups had explained that they did not want medicals every year as they felt this was stigmatising. Nowadays young people had choices of who and when they saw someone. Some Looked After Children still wanted to see a nurse, however this was now by means of a health assessment, rather than a medical, and these could be arranged out of school hours and at a drop in centre.
- 7.24 An issue that was very important to Looked After Children was that of confidentiality. The social worker and residential worker received a copy of work plans, however this did not contain any personal information. Often Looked After Children discussed personal issues with the nurses, but this information was not recorded. As regards the impact of physical health on the educational attainment of Looked After Children, members heard that there were some issues, such as asthma and diabetes which might interrupt or impact on school attendance but these were not considered major factors. There was a system in place to fast track a child or young person to see a paediatrician if so required.

Section Eight – Educational Support for Looked After Children

Introduction

8.1 The main mechanism by which Looked After Children receive specialist support in their education in County Durham is via the Access Service, which was formerly situated in the Education Department but now sits within Children's and Young People's Services.

The Role of the Access Service

8.2 The role of the Access Service is to promote education amongst all Looked After Children, their carers and amongst other professionals working with this group and to raise the attendance, attainment and self esteem levels of these young people.

Service Priorities

8.3 The priorities of the Service are as follows:

- To support unhindered access and full integration of Looked After Children into all education establishments.
- To promote corporate support for Looked After Children.
- To support children, parent/carers, and schools to raise the attainment of Looked After Children.
- To support young people, carers and the Education Welfare Service to improve attendance rates of Looked After Children.
- To raise educational aspirations of Looked After children.
- To train and support residential social workers, field social workers and foster carers in educational matters.
- To train and support designated teachers within each educational establishment.
- To offer pro-active support to Looked After Children who are underachieving in their education.
- To provide reactive support to young people who are experiencing problems with their education.
- To implement national and local guidance on the education of children in public care.
- To co-ordinate and analyse Personal Education Plans for all Looked After Children.
- To monitor the academic progress of all Looked After Children.
- To monitor exclusions of all Looked After Children.
- To develop inter-agency work.
- To support the County's Children's Homes and Foster Carers by assisting in the development of policies and ethos.
- To support young people through the transition between Year 6 and Year 7 and Years 9/10.
- To encourage and support transfer to further and higher education.
- To ensure that all Looked After Children with Special Education Needs have

their needs identified and met as early as possible.

- To offer home / school liaison service.
- To provide academic support during school holidays and out of hours - including the provision of residential activities for Looked After children.
- To raise policy issues with the education and social service department.
- To provide cultural activities for Looked After Children.

Referral

8.4 The Service operates an open referral system for young people, schools, parents/carers and other professionals. All referrals are via a Referral Form, which can be completed by anyone, including a young person. The development of an interactive web page will enable all to contact the Service.

Support provided by the Access Service

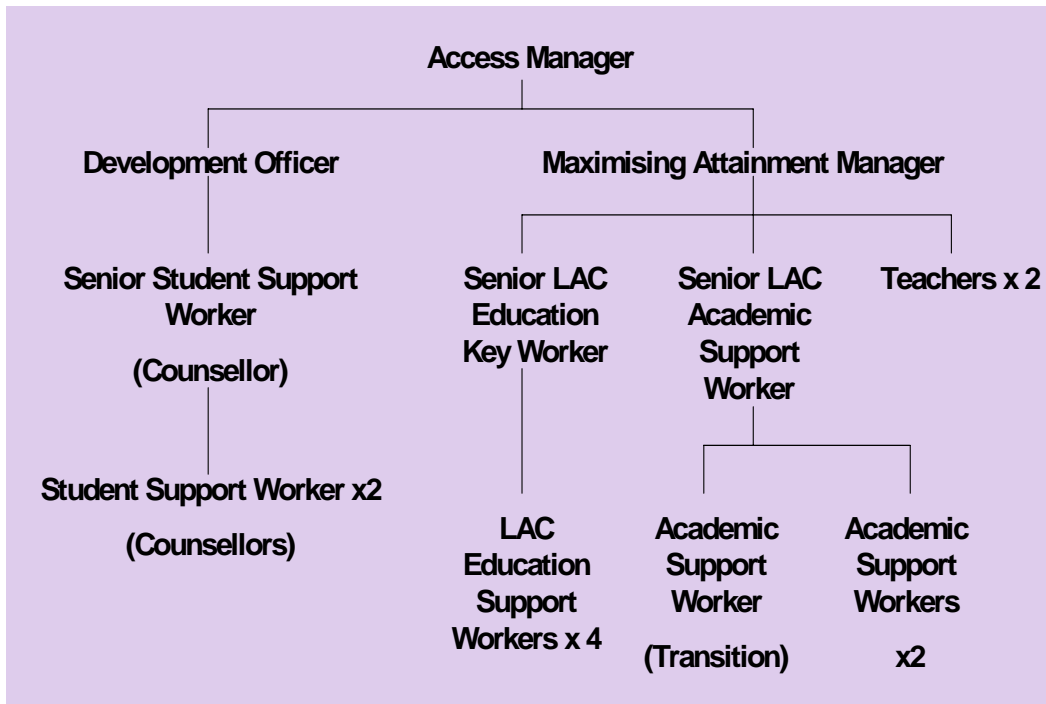
8.5 The Access Service provides support in the following areas:

- **Additional Curriculum Support** - Support to meet to needs of individual Looked After Children who are in danger of under-achieving. This can be in-class support, 1:1 support in school or at home, homework clubs, study support groups, etc.
- **Home/School Liaison** - Assisting schools and carers to develop closer links with one another and to raise the knowledge of issues surrounding the education of Looked After children.
- **Advice** - Advice for young people and to all adults with an interest in the education of young people in public care.
- **Counselling** - Confidential counselling service for young people to discuss and find solutions to issues of importance to them. A variety of different counselling methods are applied including SFBT.
- **Monitoring** - The service collects data for the Local Education Authority and Social Services including attendance rates, exclusion rates, GCSE results and SATS results.
- **Supported Integration/Re-integration** - Support to enable chronic non-attenders to return to school or any other educational provision.
- **Children's Homes** - Work in partnership with residential social workers to implement policies and to strengthen the educational ethos within the Counties Children's Homes.
- **Cultural & Social** - Work in partnership with carers and social workers to provide cultural and social development opportunities: e.g. Arts projects, museum visits, links with Libraries, holiday activities and residential activities.
- **Transitions** - To support Looked After Children at Key Stages of their

education, particularly Year 6 and Year 7, Year 9 options and transition into post 16 provision.

- **Training** - Training for specific interest groups (e.g. carers, designated teachers, governors, Members, other professionals). Training can also be arranged to promote greater understanding and knowledge across a range of agencies.

Access Service Organisation Chart



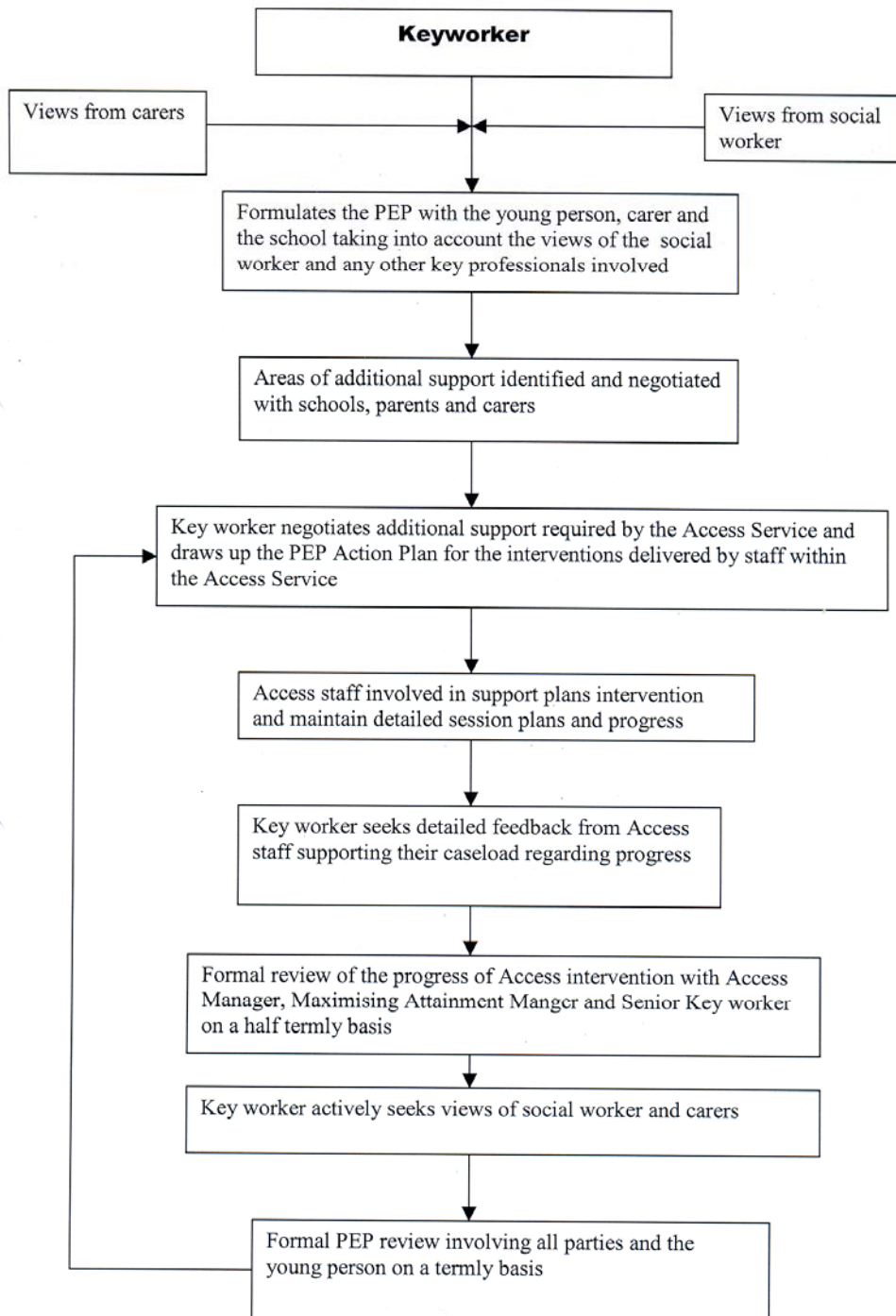
Roles of Individual Staff

Education Key Workers

8.6 The Senior Key Worker manages 4 Education Key Workers, who deal with children from Year 5 until after they leave school. The Key Worker's main role is to develop a Personal Education Plan (PEP) for each child which clearly identifies targets. Both the child and the parent/carer are included during the preparation of the PEP, which consists of one academic target and two others, which can be non-academic. The role undertaken by the Key Worker involves identifying and gaining support for the child to help increase their confidence and to motivate them. The progress of the child towards the achieving of these targets is monitored regularly. Rewards are given to the young people when they achieve their targets. Some young people do not want to engage in preparation of PEPs, but usually another way of completing the PEP, via teachers or carers can be found. It is recognised that there is a need to do more to support the needs of younger children (Year 5 and below), but this would require additional resources. Details of the Personal Educational Plan process are set out below and copies of PEPs for Years 10 and 11 are attached in the Appendices to the

Report.

Co-ordination of support for the delivery of PEP Actions



Maximising Attainment/Academic Support

- 8.7 The Maximising Attainment section of the Team provides various forms of support, which can range from literacy or numeracy to assistance with work for the ASDAN Awards (Award Scheme – Development and Accreditation). The support is tailored to the individual needs of the child and can include one-to-one support, revision in groups, and support given outside of school. In addition, it was highlighted that the Team is delivering a specific GCSE in citizenship, which gained a 100% pass rate in the previous year.
- 8.8 The ASDAN Awards have been very successful and are available for 14-26 year old applicants. As part of the scheme, the young people have to produce a portfolio on which they are assessed; however, once they achieve silver grade they then move onto the CoPE Award which has GCSE equivalent status. Programmes are also currently being run with Newcastle Falcons, and Middlesbrough and Sunderland Football Clubs promoting literacy, numeracy, ICT skills and healthy living which, as well as helping academically, promotes self-esteem in the young people. A new scheme is also being pioneered - the ASDAN Stepping Stones, which concentrates on the following:-
- Roles and Responsibilities
 - Citizenship
 - Health and Lifestyle
 - Wider community

Student Support

- 8.9 The Student Support Team has a manager and two workers. The approach adopted is very person-centred and based on what the young person brings to sessions. Many young people in the Looked After System have issues relating to:
- Bereavement – need to bring an end to a particular episode, leave loss and move forward.
 - Attachment – help them to rebuild on the attachments that they have and try to find continuity.
 - Getting them to come to terms with how they feel.
- 8.10 The Team also carries out training with carers and professionals, helping them to deal with young people and identify how they can assist the young person to move the situation along. All those working in the Team are Members of the British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists.

Student Mentoring

- 8.11 A Mentoring Scheme is run in collaboration with Collingwood College, Durham University and has been running for 3 years. The scheme currently has 26 students (all of whom are Criminal Records Bureau checked) working in a mentoring role, with children as young as 9 years of age taking part. The scheme offers the opportunity for Looked After Children to encounter different life

experiences, social as well as educational. The aims of the project are to:-

- Provide consistent adult support/contact
- Support and develop life skills and introduce new hobbies
- Provide a positive influence

It is a unique scheme, with a great emphasis placed on the matching of interests. Very many positive comments have been received from the young people taking part.

Funding to Support the Education of Looked After Children

8.12 The Access Service has a total budget of £512,750 (excluding REAch and Impact) to support the education of vulnerable children particularly those that are looked after but also:

- Children who have social services involvement particularly those at risk of entering the care system
- Children who have been recently adopted
- Children with troubled home backgrounds including substance misuse, domestic violence and children whose parents have mental health problems

8.13 From the total budget figure £415765 is deployed to support the education of looked after children as follows:

Staff costs*	£362799	These are pro rata staff costs for supporting looked after children of school age and post 16 together with mileage allocations and 20% on costs
University of Durham Mentoring Programme	£27000	Costs include Co-ordinator salary costs, expenses for the mentor and mentee, training and travel costs
Tutor Bank	£5000	To support additional 1:1 tuition in subjects that cannot be supported within the Access Service together with funding for Revision Programmes and resources
Overheads	£20966	This includes office and administrative costs, postage, stationery, training, staff mobiles and laptops
TOTAL:	£415765	

8.14 The staff costs are broken down as follows:

Staff Role	Pro rata allocation for LAC - fte
Access Manager	0.5
Maximising Attainment Manager	0.8
Development Officer	0.75
5 Education Key workers	5.00
2 Academic Support Workers	1.6
Senior Academic Support Worker	0.75
Transition Academic Support Worker	0.8
2 LAC teachers	1.8
Senior Student Support Worker	0.5
2 Student Support Workers	1.00
Full Time Equivalents	13.5 fte (11.45 fte direct work with LAC)

The Role of Designated Teachers and Governors in Promoting the Education of Looked After Children

8.15 A recently issued Department for Education and Skills guidance document for Designated School Governors “Supporting Looked After Learners” (January 2006) contains clear guidance about the respective roles of Looked After Children Designated Governors and Teachers.

8.16 The joint DfES/DH guidance “Education of Children and Young People in Public Care” (May 2000) recommended that schools assign a senior member of staff as designated teacher to act as a champion for looked after children. Under the duty to promote the educational achievement of looked after children, local authorities should also keep an up-to-date list of designated teachers to help facilitate communication with schools. The role of designated teacher for looked after children sits alongside that of the designated teacher for child protection and the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO). For all these roles the guidance indicates that it is vital that sufficient time is made available in the timetable to ensure these staff can undertake their duties properly. Guidance further suggests that it should not be assumed that the SENCO is the right person for the role of designated teacher for looked after children. The specific duties of the designated teacher vary depending on the number of looked after children in the school and the circumstances and needs of each individual child.

8.17 All designated teachers for looked after children are responsible for:

- Ensuring the effective transfer of educational information between agencies and individuals
- Establishing and ensuring appropriate boundaries of confidentiality
- Establishing an ongoing dialogue for communication with key agencies such as Social Services, the Access Service, Connexions and others
- Disseminating appropriate information to teachers and governors

- Welcoming each Looked After Child to their school and arranging necessary support to ensure a successful integration
- Ensuring that the needs of each Looked After Child are identified and that they have an appropriate advocate
- Ensuring that each young person has a Personal Education Plan (PEP)
- Collating the PEP and arranging PEP review meetings
- Ensuring the annual completion of PEPs, termly updates, and return to the Access Service within relevant timescales
- Ensuring strong communication within the school to support other staff and raise issues relevant to children in public care
- Monitoring the progress of Looked After Children and ensuring they receive appropriate academic and pastoral support
- Send termly attendance/exclusion data to the Access Service
- Maintain ongoing contact with the Access Service for additional support as required
- Represent Education at all Looked After Children Reviews either in person or by written report
- Produce an annual report for governors on the achievements of looked After Children in their school
- Have an ongoing commitment to professional development on issues around children in public care
- Ensure all key staff in the school receive training on issues relevant to young people in public care
- Ensure the needs of Looked After Children are taken into account in whole school policies/procedures
- Ensure the whole school has high expectations for all pupils including Looked After Children.

8.18 The 2006 guidance suggests that Governors should encourage designated teachers to attend training, which is normally organised by local authorities. Training should cover all aspects of the care system and the impact of care upon education, responsibilities under the Children Act and associated Regulations. It should also include the role of the school in relation to care planning and statutory reviews. Governors should be aware that designated teachers should decide, in conjunction with relevant local authority staff, their approach to sharing sensitive information about an individual child. This is not just about record keeping, but also about a child's identity in the school. Some children are happy for the fact that they are "in care" to be known by staff and other pupils, while others do not want to be stigmatised as different because they do not live with their families. For other children there will be official requirements that their status is not identified.

The Specific Roles of Designated Teachers and Governors

Background

8.19. As part of the evidence gathering process for the scrutiny project, it was decided that members would observe a training session for Looked After Children Designated School Governors. Members attended an evening training event at Easington Community School on the evening of 22nd November 2005.

Outline of Designated Governor Training Event

8.20. The training event was structured as follows:-

- Welcome and purpose of session.
- What do participants already know about Looked After Children?
- Educational achievement of Looked After Children.
- Exploring the role of the Looked After Governor.

8.21 Training was delivered by staff from the Access Service and commenced with a quiz to assess participants' knowledge of Looked After Children issues. Participants then received a briefing about the educational attainment of Looked After Children both nationally and locally. The session concluded with a discussion about the sorts of issues that designated governors should champion within their schools.

Issues

8.22 Some of the issues raised during the session included:

- Performance of Looked After Children dips between Key Stages 1/2 and 3. It was suggested this might be to do with the different environment in secondary school.
- Five key workers have now been appointed to support Looked After Children, although they carry substantial workloads.
- Are we doing enough to support carers of Looked After Children who may not understand or be familiar with new ways of teaching subjects such as Mathematics and English?
- Achievement for Looked After Children is not always academic. Building self-esteem is also important and the mentoring provided by University students to Looked After Children down to Year 7 helped with this process.
- There is no national template for Personal Education Plans. Young people in County Durham were involved in the design of PEPs and they were constantly up-dated to reflect the latest developments.
- A number of accredited courses were being developed which Looked After Children had access to which counted as GCSE equivalents (COPE, ASDAN, etc.).
- Despite reminders to schools, PEPs for 18% of Looked After Children had still not been completed. The majority of these related to Year 4 and under. [By the end of December 2005 the figure stood at 4% of PEPs not returned]
- There is no statutory requirement to have designated governors and designated teachers for Looked After Children. However, there is a

designated teacher and governor in every school in County Durham.

- The majority of designated teachers have not received any training about Looked After Children issues other than written material.

Specific Governor Related Issues

8.23 Designated Governors are given clear advice during the training session about their specific role as a Designated Governor. Members felt this added clarity to the process and a copy of this 'job description' is set out for the information of the working group.

8.24 Some of the other issues discussed at the conclusion of the training session were as follows:-

- The need for Designated Governors to have on-going training/up-dates (including keeping those Governors who did not currently have Looked After Children in their school engaged in the process).
- The development of Designated Governor (and teacher) networks
- A newsletter for Designated Governors (and teachers).
- The importance of maintaining an up-to-date database of Designated Governors.

8.25 Members noted that the training seminar was of a high quality. Originally it was planned that three Designated Governors would attend for training but only one attended the session. Given that the Access Service Manager and a colleague delivered the training, this might not be seen as a best use of resources.

Advice on the Role of the Looked After Designated Governor in County Durham

8.26 Looked after Children Designated Governors in County Durham who attend training are advised that a Designated Governor's role is to:

- Create an ethos whereby children who do not live with their birth families are equally respected and valued.
- Be aware who the looked after children are in their school.
- Identify the designated teacher for looked after children within the school.
- Ensure all looked after children have a current PEP which is reviewed three times per year.
- Ensure looked after children are receiving appropriate, full time education and have equal access to all aspects of school including a broad curriculum, out of school hours opportunities, work experience and careers guidance.

- Liaise with the designated teacher regarding the targets and progress of individual pupils and additional support required.
- Be aware of educational issues affecting looked after children and monitor the actions taken by the school in addressing them.
- Assist the school in ensuring the policies and practices on behaviour, admissions, exclusions, attendance and special educational needs address the needs of looked after children and provide equality of opportunity.
- Ensure staff in school have relevant training about the needs of looked after children.
- Report on an annual basis to the Governing Body on the progress of looked after children within the school.
- Ensure the achievements of looked after children are recognised and celebrated.

Section Nine – Other Support Mechanisms for Looked After Children

Introduction

9.1 There are many agencies, both statutory and voluntary who support Looked After Children. For the purpose of this project we chose to take evidence from two such agencies. We spoke with a Charity, Care in Durham, who we had heard about as part of a consultation with care leavers in October 2006. We also took evidence from the Young People's Service. We were interested to find out more about the Service because of the complimentary remarks from young people about personal advisers from the Service made to us at the same consultation event.

Care in Durham

9.2 We heard about the work of Care in Durham from Jeff Spence (then Project Manager of the Charity) and Sandy Nugent (Board Member). The aims of Care in Durham are to:

- To help young people who have been looked after get together and have fun
- To listen to young people who have been looked after
- To make things better for young people

9.3 Research has shown that young people looked after suffer from isolation, failure to build and maintain relationships, do not achieve as good grades in exams etc. In short they are disadvantaged. Care in Durham's aims are designed to combat this disadvantage by keeping young people in touch with friends they have met in the Care System, helping them meet new friends at Care in Durham, making sure that their opinions and views are heard, and introducing them to new experiences. Care in Durham also try to help them back into education via the citizenship GCSE course or help them gain skills that can help them in independent living. Although they are an independent organisation, they work with Social Care and Health on these matters. Young people who engage with Care in Durham come from all parts of the County, although there is less representation from the east of Durham.

What Care in Durham believes in

9.4 As a group and as individuals, Care in Durham accepts people for who they are regardless of:

- Colour
- Ability
- Religion
- Ethnic Origins
- Sexual Identity
- Gender
- Recent History

9.5 During the second half of 2004 Care in Durham went through a very bleak stage where they weren't sure what the future would be. Members of the Board of Trustees gave up their free time to keep the development group. As well as applying for funding from various organisations, members of the development group carried out sponsored activities to raise funds. Eventually, Care in Durham secured funding from the Northern Rock Foundation which enabled them to appoint a new Project Manager and continue with their work. Despite the recent funding received from Northern Rock, further funding had become increasingly difficult to find, resulting in the Group losing the Project Manager. However the board of trustees would continue to run the project until they are able to secure new funding. For the project to successfully reach the aims and employ the staff to run Care in Durham about £80,000 p.a. was required. Members of the Working Group were subsequently advised by officers that there were opportunities for Care in Durham to access up to £10,000 of County Council support under a Service Level Agreement, dependent upon submission of a suitable business case.

Care in Durham Development Group

9.6 The Development Group is made up of young people from across the County. Over the last year the Development Group had:

- Completed a sponsored walk at Roseberry Topping
- Worked with the board of trustees to get Care in Durham back on its feet
- Organised and successfully run a Christmas Party
- Delivered Total Respect training
- Undertaken other social activities for young people

GCSE Citizenship

9.7 The second year of the Citizenship Group successfully completed their course in 2005. This had been the first time that Care in Durham managed to successfully include young people from different cultural backgrounds, in some cases English was not even their first language. Year 3 was now under way and would take their exams in May. This course was run to enable young people to gain a recognised qualification to help them in their search for employment, further education or training.

Future Plans

9.8 Care in Durham hoped to be able to introduce some practical qualifications to help young people achieve their aims. These included:

- A full first-aid certificate
- Bronze medallion in lifesaving
- Sports coaching badges
- Cookery lessons
- Motorcycles/basic mechanics (with the Leaving Care Service)

- 9.9 In 2006 Care in Durham introduced “Awareness Evenings” where young people from the Development Group can meet up with people from other organisations to talk about problems that young people may face when leaving care and becoming more independent. To date, Care in Durham have talked to the Looked After Children Nurse about health, DART about tenancy problems, End House (Claypath, Durham) about sexual health matters and other services that they can offer. Meetings have also been held with Gay Advice Durham and Darlington to make young people aware of Hate Crime and have run an awareness evening about Parenting Skills. This service is open to all care leaders who are interested. Information about forthcoming events are posted on their brand new website which is

www.careindurham.iwarp.com

- 9.10 A selection of young people from the Care in Durham Development Group were currently training to deliver Total Respect to Foster Carers and Local Councillors in April and Councillors in May 2006. It was also hoped to continue delivering training to designated teachers in schools across the County in conjunction with the Access Service. No such training had yet been developed for designated governors. Care in Durham was also piloting a Looked After Children Drop-In session with an officer from the Children’s Service to discuss issues.

Issues

- 9.11 In evidence, the Care in Durham representatives told us that the following issues were important:
- Stability for Looked After Children, both in terms of home and school placements.
 - The need to better promote the benefits of GCSEs to young people.
 - Quiet Study areas in Children’s Residential Homes
 - More vocational courses to enable Looked After Children who are not as gifted academically to gain relevant skills to enable them to gain employment on leaving care
 - The need for designated teachers to treat Looked After Children no differently to other pupils in relation to issues such as homework.

The Young People’s Service

- 9.12 The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 places a duty on the responsible authority (in this case, the County Council) to keep in touch with young people who have previously been looked after, up to the age of 21 (or 24 for those in education). We heard that the Young People’s Service (part of Children’s and Young People’s Services) currently works with approximately 300 young people from the age of 15½ upwards. The main interface between the Service and Looked After Children is via the Young Person’s Advisor. The Working Group met with the Manager of the Service, Dorothy Alexander, other professional staff from the Service and two young people who are currently receiving support from the Service.

Staffing

9.13 Staffing of the Young People's Service is as follows:

- Service Manager
- 2 Team Managers
- 15 Young People's Advisors
- 2 Connexions Personal Advisors
- 2 Welfare Rights workers
- Accommodation Officer (Centrepoint)
- Supported Lodgings Co-ordinator
- 2 Supported Lodgings project workers
- Teenagers to Work Co-ordinator
- Health advisor (to be appointed)

9.14 The role of the Young Person's Advisor is to remain in touch with the young person, via face-to-face meetings, phone calls, letters, texts, and/or emails. Continuous assessment, through means of a pathway plan (which extends at least up to the age of 21 years) is undertaken, to ensure support is properly targeted. Advisors carefully monitor the changing needs of each young person in order to provide comprehensive support and facilitate access to relevant services. The Service is in contact with 95% of 19 year olds. The majority of these are in appropriate accommodation, some in supported lodgings. The ratio of 19 year olds in education, employment and training is 0.89 to 1, and 3 young people are at university.

9.15 The Service provides:

- Personal support
- Help for young people to find and remain in accommodation
- Support to undertake education/training and find employment
- Help to maintain contact with family and friends
- Practical and other skills (independent living etc.)
- Support in obtaining financial assistance
- Assistance with young people accessing health services

Issues Raised

9.16 The two Looked After young people who attended the evidence session were asked what the authority could do to better support them. They highlighted the need for ongoing support and re-assurance from the Council and its officers. Reference was also made to the grant they received which was said to barely cover their domestic bills (although this was not as important as receiving help and assistance). The young people also referred to the difficulties arising from and unsettling nature of frequent moves of placement. They also said they did not want to be treated any differently to other children and gave an example of being invited to stay at a friend's house, where Criminal Records Bureau checks had been required prior to this being allowed. The Working Group was advised that the policy had now been changed to make it less restrictive but it was

explained why the authority was so careful, given duty of care requirements.

- 9.17 Issues about Looked After Children from Homes appearing in Youth Courts were discussed. Some damage incidents they were involved in at Homes were reported to the police with the young people ending up in Court. Members asked whether a parent would report their own child to the police if they broke something at home. The Group was advised that a project was being undertaken on restorative justice and staff were being trained on how to deal with incidents in the homes, and that referring an incident to the police should be the last resort. One of the Magistrate members of the Working Group subsequently reported that new guidance had been issued within the Criminal Justice system which should help to prevent some of these issues coming to Court.

Section Ten - Consultation

Introduction

10.1 An important element of any scrutiny investigation is consultation with stakeholders to find out what they think of services and support. As part of this investigation a number of consultation sessions were held as follows:

- Young people
- Foster Carers
- Designated Teachers and Governors (by Survey/Questionnaire)

Consultation with Young People

Consultation Methods Employed

10.2 Consultation with young people was carried out in two separate sessions. The first session, held on 19 October 2005 at County Hall, was with care leavers aged 17-24. The second session took place on 12 April 2006 at the Care in Durham Offices in Durham City with a group of young people of varied age range at the conclusion of an intensive revision session in preparation for a GCSE Citizenship course.

Consultation with Care Leavers

10.3 Prior to the session on 19 October 2005, members had an opportunity to chat with young people over refreshments. The consultation event took place during Local Democracy week and so began with a presentation by Councillors about their roles which young people had requested.

10.4 During the consultation, Councillor Bowman explained there were three areas about which members of the Working Group would welcome young people's views concerning their education whilst Looked After:

- What helped
- What didn't help
- What could have been done better

What Helped?

Young people put forward the following views in relation to what helped:

- **Stability and having placements near to schools previously attended** – One young person attended school in Consett, but had been placed in a foster home at Wolsingham. She had found the journeys tiring and felt this had impacted on her behaviour, which eventually led to her being excluded from school.
- **More individual support for young people in care homes** – It was said that it was difficult for young people to study or concentrate on school work in care homes when other young people living there “kicked off” and caused

disruption. More intensive support had helped counter this.

What Didn't Help?

The following views were expressed in relation to what didn't help:

- **Being approached all the time and asked if they wanted counselling –** One young person said he didn't feel any different and didn't want any special treatment. Another said that there was a misconception that most young people who were Looked After were in care because of things they had done, whereas for the most part, it was because of what other people had or hadn't done.
- **Lack of Understanding of the Needs of Looked After Young People –** One young person felt that designated teachers would have more understanding if they made an effort to attend training sessions that were organised for professional staff such as "Total Respect" delivered by Looked After young people [Members felt that this might apply equally well to LAC designated school governors and corporate parents].
- **Views of other young people –** There was stigma attached to being in care and a lack of understanding amongst other young people at school about why it happened and what it entailed. There may be opportunities to address this deficiency through the PSHE part of the school curriculum and this should be encouraged.

What could have been done Better?

Young people expressed the following views:

- **More intensive support from social workers when young people moved placements/schools –** One young person explained how difficult it had been catching up with her schoolwork when she moved school half-way during the academic year. Everything was different – teachers, classmates and lessons, and more support would have been helpful.
- **More stability in terms of school –** It was explained by one young person that the most important thing for her was continuity of school and particularly her friends at the school. When young people moved placements, wherever possible their new placement should be as near to their existing school as possible
- **A less patronising approach from teachers**
- **Support with Information Technology –** Provision of a computer. There seemed to be disparity in terms of provision. Some young people had received considerable support, with provision of computers; others had not received the same level of support.
- **Provision of crèches for the children of young people who are in secondary education or moving into Further Education –** The Learning and Skills Council co-opted member explained that there should be support, but we heard that once young people were over 19 they were expected to make a financial contribution.
- **Stability of placement –** One of the young people outlined how he had been "kicked out" of one placement on the day he was taking a GCSE exam. He

had had predicted “A” grades, but only achieved “D’s.”

- **A more sensitive approach to support in the classroom** – Although it was recognised that additional support for some looked after young people might be needed in the classroom, the manner in which it was provided sometimes drew attention to the status of the young person concerned. One young person said that this had been picked up by some of her classmates and she had felt stigmatised as a result.
- **Better identification of dyslexia** – Young people pointed out that this wasn’t just a Looked After Children issue, but applied to all young people. A free dyslexia testing service would help.

10.5 The following views not linked directly to education, but covering issues including the Council’s role as corporate parent, were also expressed by the young people present:

- **Looked After Young People rarely see Corporate Parents** – It was explained by members that visits are undertaken unannounced. They usually take place during the day when young people may be at school.
- **When Corporate Parents do carry out visits they are more interested in checking the books than talking to young people** – Members explained that systems were now being changed to allow more interaction between young people and their corporate parents during visits.
- **Visits by Corporate Parents during school holidays might be useful**
- **Young People needed to find out more about their Corporate Parents** – It was suggested by young people that Councillors make a video/DVD and/or produce a leaflet which explained what their role was for the benefit of the young people they would be visiting and that this be sent to young people prior to visits.
- **More Interaction between Looked After Young People and their Corporate Parents** – The young people suggested a series of informal events (quarterly?) with music/food etc. where looked after young people could meet their corporate parents.
- **Some Corporate Parents find it hard to engage with looked after young people** – It was suggested that it would be beneficial for Corporate Parents to attend the “Total Respect” training course.
- **Social Workers** – All the young people present felt that their Personal Advisers were “great” but did not feel supported by their Social Workers.
- **Care in Durham** – The support provided by Care in Durham was excellent and young people expressed the view that it should receive greater support from the County Council.

10.6 The young people were advised that the issues raised in relation to corporate parenting would be considered at an early meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel. The other issues raised would inform the recommendations of the Scrutiny Working Group.

Consultation with Young People from Care in Durham

10.7 Consultation took place on 12 April 2006 with a small group of young people aged from 11 to 24 years at the conclusion of an intensive GCSE citizenship

revision session facilitated by Care in Durham. Not all of the young people were (or had been) looked after. The main issues raised in the session were:

- One of the young people had not attended school from the age of 12 onwards. She said she had received no meaningful help from either social workers or teachers. Of her time in school, she had felt stigmatised because she was looked after.
- Another of the young people had been bullied at school. He explained that because he had been looked after for a period of time he had tried “too hard” to make friends at school and had ended up being bullied. This young man made much of the importance of having a teacher who understood and was able to relate to him.
- All of the young people agreed that having a teacher or social worker “who cared” made a big difference.
- Reference was made to the need to ensure that young people looked after were provided with clear guidance at around Year 7 about the vocational pathways that were available, as well as academic choices.
- Young people felt that key issues in terms of support on leaving care were:
 - Clear guidance in relation to benefits
 - Specialist advice about housing (i.e. tenancies).

Consultation with Carers

Carers Consultation Event

- 10.8 As part of the ongoing support provided to carers by the County Council, regular meetings are held to discuss issues of interest. The Working Group made a visit, during the course of the project, to Durham Resource Centre where members attended a Carers Consultation Event. Over 30 carers were present. It was an opportunity to find out, first hand, the views of foster carers about the support provided to help looked after children achieve their best educationally.
- 10.9 At the event foster carers were advised that the educational attainment of Looked After Children as one of the priority areas of the Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee accepted that more needed to be done to raise the educational attainment of these young people to better equip them for adult life.
- 10.10 Foster carers were asked to comment upon what the Authority did to support looked after children that works and what did not work; what could be done better, was there sufficient support to foster carers to ensure young people succeed in education, and what support could be provided to them to assist in this. The issues were considered in workshop sessions with foster carers and members and the main points raised were:-
- Communication between the school and carers was one of the main areas highlighted for improvement. It was seen as more important an issue as a child became older and more independent as contact with the school diminishes. The situation was compounded if a child attended a school that was a distance from the carers home.

- In most schools there was one named teacher that a child could go to that would offer support. It was felt important for a child to be able to contact his/her social worker also. It was noted that in some cases a child had access to the social worker's mobile telephone however it was felt that this should be extended to all children.
- It was suggested that Head Teachers and Looked After Designated Teachers be invited to attend the Carers Consultative meetings.
- It was daunting for a child to start a new school and this could be improved by having welcome packs, visits around the school and if they were able to meet with a teacher this would provide the opportunity before the child starts school to discuss any difficulties or concerns that the child may have.
- Carers acknowledged the value of training that they receive, however some new areas were highlighted:-
 - the "understandability" of the some of the language used in schools - examples were given of 'curriculum' and 'attainment'
 - dyslexia/dyspraxia training be re-run
 - information about exclusions from school would give carers the confidence to go to the school to discuss the problem and challenge the decision appropriately.
 - clarification on the split of responsibility between the carer and social worker.
- Support from the Access Service, whether in schools or in the home, was welcomed and was making a difference.
- Resources for looked after children could be improved:
 - when a child moves school the resources allocated do not move with the child.
 - a child needs stability and when a child moves to a new home it often seems that travelling costs seem more important than what is better for the child.
 - children would benefit from having access to computers. They would be able to gain more knowledge through research on the internet and improve the presentation of their work. Children without access to a computer were stigmatised.
 - the sharing of text books means that children are being disadvantaged. In addition to each child having their own text books, SATs revision books could be provided
 - Looked After Children often feel stigmatised and rejected when in foster care, and often extra support is required
 - The mentoring service be extended to looked after children
 - Extra support be provided to a child with a statement
 - Some young children have speech difficulties and there is often a delay in them receiving speech therapy
 - A PEP plan be agreed between the carer, child and teacher.
 - Children should be rewarded for working hard and an awards ceremony for looked after children be held

- The opportunity for engagement and dialogue between carers and the Corporate Parents (perhaps annually) would be welcomed.

Consultation with Designated Teachers and Governors

Postal Questionnaire Survey

- 10.11 As part of the evidence gathering for this project, a questionnaire was circulated to all designated teachers and governors of Looked after Children to determine whether they received the necessary support to fulfil their designated role to promote the education attainment of Looked After Children. A questionnaire was circulated in March 2006 to all designated teachers and governors for Looked after Children in County Durham.
- 10.12 Due to the distribution of schools in County Durham, a postal questionnaire was seen as the best form of contact. The questionnaires comprised a mixture of closed and open questions to ensure all areas were covered and to allow explanation of answers. Out of 596 questionnaires distributed, 276 were returned. A further 25 were received after the return date. This was a 50% return rate, which was statistically important in this investigation. 169 designated teacher questionnaires and 107 designated governor questionnaires were returned.

Survey Results

- 10.13 The closed questions from the designated teachers revealed that:
- 50% of schools had looked after children
 - All designated teachers who had looked after children in their school knew who they were
 - 87% knew the designated governor for looked after children
 - 49% of looked after children had personal education plans
 - 68% of teachers did not feel that they received the necessary support to fulfil their designated teacher role
 - 68% did not feel they had a strong understanding of their duties as designated teacher, and
 - 30% of designated teachers commented that they had no training from the Access service
- 10.14 The results compare with the closed questions from the designated governors, which highlighted that:
- 57% of schools had looked after children
 - 18% of designated governors with looked after children in their school did not know who they were
 - 91% knew the designated teacher for looked after children
 - 59% of looked after children had personal education plans prepared
 - 81% believed that received the necessary support to fulfil their designated governor role
 - 70% felt they had a strong understanding of their role as designated governor

- 20% of designated governors had received training from the Access service, 49% of designated governors reported back annually to their governing body

Analysis of Data

10.15 Following analysis of data, two main issues were highlighted:

- **Preparation of Personal Education Plans (PEP's), and**
- **Training for designated teachers and governors**

In relation to designated governors' understanding of their role, 70% felt they had a strong understanding, yet only 20% had attended training.

Personal Education Plans (PEP's)

10.16 Guidance issued by the Government in 2000 indicated that every child and young person in care should have a personal education plan that sets out their academic achievements.

10.17 Personal Education Plans (PEP's) are in place from the designated teacher/ Looked after Children key worker to reflect on how they feel about school, how they are achieving, what they would like to do in the future and their hobbies. The final section asks the student to set themselves 3 targets, one of which must be academic. The PEP is monitored/reviewed to ensure the student meets goals.

10.18 Comments from the designated teachers and governors about PEPS were:

“Why do we need them? All children are taught in differentiated groups and make good progress”

“A meeting to prepare PEP's was arranged but then cancelled”

“I feel Individual education plans (IEP's) cover this...should we be doing more?”

“All pupils have them in our school”

“Further guidance is needed as I am new to the role. PEP's were not prepared by the previous designated teacher but I am unsure why this is the case”

“I have found that the PEP's are not very useful in younger children, plus they add to the amount of paperwork we have to do!”

“PEP's and data forms have not been sent for our Looked after Children, I was assured there was another way of working”

“This is a nursery school and as such not compulsory education and we are not required to complete PEP's”

10.19 From the results, it appears that there are still some Looked after Children without PEP's in County Durham, although Access Service staff have advised that this is approximately 4% of Looked after Children, primarily in the lower year groups.

Designated Teacher and Governor Training

10.20 The Access Service training programme is designed to provide information and to support designated teachers and governors. The number of designated teachers and governors attending training was, however, a concern.

10.21 Venues for training included: Bishop Auckland, Kingsway, Consett Civic Centre, County Hall, Durham, Durham Gilesgate Sixth Form Centre, EDEC (Electronic Design Education Consortium), Murton Glebe, Stanley Community Centre, Stanley Professional Development Centre (PDC) and Peterlee.

10.22 Teachers and Governors were asked to comment on the reasons why training was poorly attended and how training could be made more accessible. Some of the responses are set out below:

“There are too many courses on offer; we need to spend more time in the school teaching to ensure our children have continuity in teaching content, approach and method”

“It depends on the time of the head teacher, I have noticed a low turnout of meetings”

“After school and onsite training”

“They are always at busy periods in the term. Short, brief meetings are best, 9.30 or 2.30 start and no coffee break”

“I was not aware there was training, I thought it was just for governors”

“Cluster training”

“Make courses clearly advertised, I haven't seen any!”

“I did not find the training helpful, it was very general”

“Don't cancel courses without informing applicant and arrange courses after school so cover is not an issue”

“Its all about time! What about sending non-teaching staff/support staff? Does it have to be a teacher?”

“Stop putting everything on the extranet – unless you know what you're looking for you can't find it”.

“A message from the head teacher at their area meetings to indicate the importance of the looked after children designated teacher training. Use a school as a venue as we like to look around other schools and also provide funding for supply cover”.

10.23 One Governor recommended the Department for Education and Skills 'Supporting Looked After Learners: A practical guide from School Governors' (2006) and another understood that there was guidance on Governet, available at:

www.governet.co.uk

10.24 The main themes displayed from the written comments about training were:

- Timing of sessions
- Location of sessions
- Cluster meetings
- Advertisement of courses
- Prioritisation of courses, and
- Funding

10.25 Despite there being a low percentage of designated teachers and governors attending training, most schools appear to have good communication mechanisms in place for looked after children. These included:

- Half-termly reviews;
- Pupil tracking systems;
- Pastoral systems- which clearly state the responsibilities for all adults involved with children/young people and which are reviewed by the school every two weeks;
- Monitoring via class teacher, head teacher, parents, carers and young people;
- Personal Education Plans (PEP's) and Individual Education Plans (IEP's);
- Communication with Access Service and Social Services
- Direct contact with the designated teachers and governors of Looked after Children;
- Contact with The Special Education Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) and Special Educational Needs (SEN);
- Team meetings; and
- Open door policies

10.26 One school (Annfield Plain) supplied its own looked after policy.

Raising the Educational Attainment of Looked After Children

10.27 Designated teachers and governors were also asked their views on what needs to be done to raise the educational attainment of looked after children. Most respondents commented that they required additional funding for resources for Looked after Children and more time spent in the classroom rather than on courses. The comments on this question were extensive from both parties, and are set out in the following paragraphs.

Designated Teacher Comments about Improving Educational Attainment

10.28 The following are a selection of comments received from Designated Teachers about how the educational attainment of looked after children could be improved:

“Looked After Children are children who need the same dedicated approach, first class training, attention and encouragement and aspiration as every child in our schools. What about equality?”

“Reduce all forms of questionnaires and forms. Teachers should be left in the classroom and this will raise standards. Developing strategies are ‘strangling’ the system and making inappropriate demands upon teachers, the profession is begging to be allowed to teach!”

“Ensure levels of support are high for individual needs. Adapt courses to suit needs and ensure courses are taken. Often out of school courses are followed by liaison and requirements for exams and a message that ‘every child matters’.”

“If teaching establishments were given more money to devote to specific learning difficulties, teachers will not have to leave the classroom for courses and it is important that pupils are not singled out. Only then will their levels of attainment rise”

“It is hard to say because the Looked After Children I know have had bad experiences but make very good progress once placed in a better environment. A lot of children have been damaged in their early years and may never recover from this. The County ought to be doing more to provide good parenting skills as early years are so valid and can never be replaced.”

“Better counselling and monitoring available, perhaps more of ‘Place2be’.”

“Focus on emotion first and education second”

“Carer support groups, to ensure carers are aware of pressures that the children have. Social time in the school for a cup of tea.”

“Less movement between placement for children and more co-ordination between Social Services.”

“More lines of extended school services and provide education and support beyond the school day. Raising attainment also starts with raising confidence, self esteem and motivation”

Designated Governor Comments about Improving Educational Attainment

10.29 The following are some of the comments received from Designated Governors about how the educational attainment of looked after children could be improved:

“Recognition in early years that academic assessments (e.g. foundations profile) don’t reflect the priorities for a four year old, who have suffered neglect, deprivation, disruption etc. That very basic ‘nurturing’ opportunity for early development is necessary before other developmental targets are even close to being achieved.”

“Put more emphasis on the responsibility of the carers to help with homework and commitment to the school and its ethos. Extra support to ‘raise the bar’ and higher levels of attainment. There is a general problem in the way Looked After Children are cared for. Children are given everything and expected to give nothing in return. Perhaps the Government needs to look at the way Looked After Children are cared for at home! There may be the answer to why educational attainment is so low.”

“Staff training for supporting looked after children”

“See children in home environment and then go from there”

“Liaise with agencies”

“Better access to emotional support from CAMHS” (Child and Adolescent mental health service)

“Share good practice between parties”

“Personal mentors - someone who cares”

“Inclusion in mainstream education, less interference that makes these children different”

“More money to help teachers and support teachers”

“Give schools budget increases to enable equal opportunities and equal access to extra curricular activities.”

“We had one incident when one Looked After Child couldn’t attend a school trip to France due to lack of funding. It would be nice for Durham County Council to establish some sort of funding so that Looked After Children are not excluded because of their home circumstances. (That child did go as a neighbour paid) I know this isn’t essential but to improve and maintain the child’s self-esteem and inclusion is important.”

Survey Conclusions

10.30 From the questionnaires received it was concluded that:

- Nearly half of all schools in County Durham have Looked After Children;
- The majority of designated teachers knew the designated governor for Looked after Children and vice versa;
- There are still some Looked after Children without PEP's;
- Advertising of the Access Service training does not appear to be reaching those who need to know; training sessions are poorly attended and do not always receive positive feedback;
- Funding and time is an issue for designated teachers;
- Many designated teachers felt support given for their role of designated teacher was not sufficient;
- Understanding by some designated teachers and governors of their role is unclear;
- Generally communication mechanisms in place for Looked after Children are adequate;
- A significant number of designated governors do report back annually to their governing body
- The well-being and emotional stability of Looked after Children was considered more important and should be examined before educational attainment, and;
- The responses highlight other issues that the Council must address, such as funding and care, before they look at raising the educational attainment of Looked after Children.

Section Eleven – Best Practice

Introduction

- 11.1 A key aspect of any scrutiny project is looking at best practice elsewhere. The Overview and Scrutiny function in Durham County Council is assisted in this regard by Northumbria University. Glenn Simpson, a researcher in the School of Public Policy provided the following evidence:
- 11.2 The relevant literature available considers two possible causative factors in poor educational attainment amongst LAC. First, that the difficult and sometimes traumatic personal and family backgrounds of LAC have left these children emotionally and intellectual damaged to a point where it is unrealistic to expect them to perform to the same levels as the general population. The alternative view is that the educational and other provision for looked after children has not been sufficient promote similar levels of achievement amongst LAC when compared with the general population.
- 11.3 Those factors regarded as having the most adverse impact on attainment levels are:
- Lack of **placement stability and consistent care**.
 - **Weak or failing corporate parenting** at policy and individual/personnel levels and lack of foster carers/access to adoption or ‘active parents’/mentors.
 - **Low expectations** and the development of a culture of low expectations among carers, professionals and children.
 - **Inadequate physical and mental health care** support and access to services, which contributes to poor health among Looked After Children.
 - **Relationships issues**, in particular having and been able to make friends.
 - **Bullying and discrimination** in and outside of school.
 - **Irregular attendance** at school.
 - **Problems and inadequacies in the care environment** in which LAC are living.
 - **Insufficient emphasis on the development of basic skills** of children at the point of admission and throughout the period in care.

Best practice in Local Government

- 11.4 Analysis of the looked after children literature and other relevant publications highlights a number of best practice recommendations for supporting looked after children in education and raising attainment levels.
- **A stress on ‘corporate parenting’**: by identifying the individuals and agencies involved and where the corporate parent is expected to do at least what a good parent would do’.
 - **Collaboration**: is vital not just between local authority departments but also with outside agencies. Councils are most effective where there is strong multi-agency, inter-agency and multi-disciplinary collaboration.

- **Personal Education Plans (PEPs):** should be available for every child in care.
- **Designated teachers in each school:** to act as a resource and advocate for children in care.
- **Information sharing:** schools, LEAs and social services need to share information on attendance, admission arrangements, special educational needs, test scores and other measures of educational progress and have effective systems in place to do this.
- **Fewer children in outside authority placements:** considerable efforts should always be made to ensure children are not placed away from their home authority, which should also be combined with more robust arrangements where such a placement cannot be avoided.
- **Training of key actors:** primary carers, social workers and teachers need to have the necessary training to equip them to be effective advocates for children in care. This is crucial where a young person is at risk of being, or has already been, excluded.

Characteristics that distinguish high performing councils

11.5 According to the Commission for Social Care Inspection, there are a number of distinguishing qualities of high performing councils in terms of principles, policies, management and practices. Those most relevant to the project were:

- **Unambiguous commitment to support families under stress** - Councils need to show commitment by working closely with partners to develop family support and early years services, better family placement capacity and development of clear strategies to reduce the numbers of looked after children.
- **Strategic planning with partners** - The degree of progress from strategic development to implementation tends to vary widely across councils. Strategic plans need to be developed with partners which contain specific aims, targets and have in place a monitoring process. Partnership working delivers better outcomes.
- **Common data across education and social care services** - There has been improvement in collection and sharing of data in a much more active way. The use of this data is an essential component to understand the educational disadvantage facing some LAC. Having good systems to monitor placement choice, stability and outcomes, ensures children are supported in a timely way.
- **Performance management systems** - tracking children and their outcomes - Unreliable information leads to poor quality decisions. Performance can be volatile and improvement in one area can be accompanied by deteriorating performance elsewhere. Consistency of performance across the service should be the aim.
- **Leadership from councillors** - Councillors' involvement needs to be constant. Regular questions should be asked: have you seen statistics about

educational attainment of LAC? Are you aware of plans to promote attainment? Councillors should have answers to questions like these. The lead member for children has a particularly important role in ensuring the Council meets its responsibility and drives forward improvements in the education of LAC.

- **Staff and leadership** - Improvement in Children's and Young People's Services comes from staff and quality political leadership. Leaders must involve, inspire and engage staff in order to drive improvement. Leaders at all levels need to listen to frontline staff and encourage them to innovate and use their ingenuity to improve Children's and Young People's Services.
- **Performance management of staff** - Effective performance management of frontline staff in both social care services and education is a way of further developing the capacity and expertise of services. This means moving away from the image of performance management as a form of bureaucracy, rather it should be linked clearly to strategies to raise the quality of the service as part of an overall improvement strategy.
- **Listen to children** - both collectively and individually - There has been a significant improvement in the ways in which children are consulted and involved in developing services. However too many children still complain that they have not been involved enough in their reviews or decisions about their placements and education.

Best Practice - Development and Support for School-based Initiatives

11.6 Local authorities can take a number of actions to develop school-based initiatives or support measures for looked after children.

- Local authority support services: establish 'learning support teams' to assist teachers and pupils. Behaviour Support Teams should work with schools to create appropriate classroom management and behaviour management techniques.
- Target-setting: ensuring Looked After Children have targets considered on an individual basis alongside their peer group.
- Homework clubs: encourage involvement in and facilitate access to both lunchtime and after-school homework clubs.
- Whole-school measures: benefits can accrue from the implementation of support measures such as learning mentors, anti-bullying and anti-truancy initiatives.
- 'Clinics' and confidentiality: held by the school nurse to allow discussion of health matters and other sensitive issues in a confidential setting.
- Provision of 'quiet rooms': to which young people can withdraw to help diffuse potential conflict.
- Alternative curricula: involving tailor-made packages with both school-based work and work experience, especially for persistent absentees.

Best Practice - Development and Support for Out-of-School Initiatives

11.7 Support and development of out of school initiatives can also be important. Local authorities and other relevant agencies can take action in a number of areas:

- Youth work and out-of-school activities: seek to improve the range of these activities.
- Readers in residence: who can work with LAC.
- Local authority projects: for LAC (using Quality Protects funding or in co-operation with charities, youth groups and voluntary organisations). These range from discount cards, which give free/cheap access to local leisure services, arts and theatre projects.
- Access to information materials: developed by outside agencies, such as Equal Chances from the Who Cares Trust, to inform those responsible for LAC.
- Provision of training and awareness-raising for professionals: to facilitate understanding in the language, requirements and priorities of other disciplines (e.g. clarification of both National Curriculum and its terminology such as 'key stages', 'programmes of study' and 'levels').
- Awareness-raising and training: particularly in literacy, numeracy and other support skills for carers.
- Support for children in care: can be provided by ex-children in care who can draw on their experiences to advise other children.
- Buddy reading: where disaffected or disadvantage young people are trained in specific skills needed to support reading among primary school children.

Comparative performance tables of high performance authorities

Table 1: Best performing councils - LAC achieving 5 GCSEs or equivalent at A*-C in 2004¹

Local authority	Population size	Number of LAC achieving five GCSEs at A*-C
Merton	187,000	35%
Dorset	392,000	27%
Westminster	181,000	21%
Plymouth	240,000	19%
Buckinghamshire	480,000	18%
Hackney	203,000	18%
Cumbria	500,000	18%
Sunderland	290,000	17%
Durham	491,000	6.6%
North East	2.5m	9.0%
England	50.1 m	9.4%

¹ National Statistics (2005) *Statistics of Education: Outcome indicators for looked after children – Twelve months to 30 September 2004 England*. Norwich: HMSO.

Comments on table 1

Geography and location - two of the top three authorities are located in the Greater London region and all of the top six performers are in southern England, more specifically London, the South East and the South West regions.

Type of local authority (in other words unitary, county council, metropolitan, urban or rural based authority) - all types of authority are found among the top performers, although the London Boroughs seem to be doing particularly well. There does not appear to be an urban-rural divide in terms of high performance.

Population size - which can give some indication of organisational size and corporate capacity, does not seem to be a significant determinant of performance.

Socio-economic issues - again the top performing local authorities represent the whole spectrum of different community types in terms of affluence, deprivation and social class etc. London Boroughs in particular have diverse ethnic and social communities.

- 11.8 From the table above it is clear that local authority performance - certainly in relation to achievement in GCSEs - does not appear to have a strong correlation to any specific 'external' factors that could influence attainment levels. However, it seems more likely that local authority performance is more greatly influenced by the internal systems, policies, practices, priorities, cultures and local contexts rather than the range of external factors described above. The table also emphasizes the huge efforts some local authorities need to make to raise the educational attainment of LAC to levels of the highest performing councils (never mind to levels of the general population).

Table 2: Total costs incurred by local authorities on LAC²

Local authority	Total Costs Incurred (£)
Merton	134,300
Dorset	194,900
Westminster	251,900
Plymouth	270,600
Buckinghamshire	148,900
Hackney	330,800
Cumbria	N/A
Sunderland	223,200
Durham	290,600
North East	1,707,300
England	36,480,000

² National Statistics/DfES (2004) *Children in Need in England: Results of a survey of activity and expenditure as reported by Local Authority Social Services' Children and Families Teams for a survey week in February 2003: Local Authority tables and further national analysis*. Norwich: HMSO.

Comments on table 2

The Total Costs Incurred refers to those costs incurred by local authority children and social services departments during the survey week. These cost include staff / centre time, on-going and one-off costs. Once again the table shows a considerable variation in the costs incurred by individual local authorities. It is worthy of note that Durham's costs are amongst the highest of those authorities mentioned in the table. Durham's costs are the highest in the North East region.

Specific examples of Good Practice among Individual Local Authorities

11.9 The following examples of local authority good practice in improving educational attainment of LAC among English local authorities were highlighted:

York City Council - Beacon Status

York City Council has achieved Beacon Status for raising overall educational attainment through tackling underachievement. York's approach to tackling underachievement targeted a number of under-performing groups including LAC. The Council believes that six key factors contributed to achieving Beacon Status. These are:

- a clear vision;
- members who were informed taking strong decisions;
- established consultation procedures;
- strong partnerships, including strong collaboration with schools;
- constant testing to find areas of improvement;
- clear long-term strategies with short-term milestones.

In relation to LAC a number of specific initiatives and projects can be highlighted.

Co-ordinating multi-agency support: in education, health and community services along with the National Children's Bureau have run joint training for staff working with LAC. A working party also provides advice, training and support to schools. Over the long-term this approach aims to empower staff so they can access support for children within their workplace, without having to refer the child to another agency.

Strategy for looked after children: the LEA and Children's and Young People's Services Department have established officer posts to co-ordinate multi-agency support for LAC. York has a designated teacher in every school in the city.

Portsmouth City Council - promoting strategic change, changing professional practice and directly supporting educational progress

Portsmouth City Council points to a number of key achievements with LAC, which are grouped according to theme.

'Promoting strategic change'

Whole authority policy on the education of looked after children

All front line departments have signed up to this policy and make annual commitments to offer practical support to LAC. This has led to departmental briefings and 'developmental' discussions about how to include LAC in training and employment; work experience opportunities and training volunteer Learning Mentors from across the council.

School governors training

The issue of LAC was not previously included in the annual governors training programme. This has now been rectified.

Library involvement

Facilitated the involvement of library services in children's homes. Assisting staff to buy relevant and current books for the children's homes. The council has also made a successful Paul Hamlyn Foundation bid for a librarian with specific responsibility for LAC.

Increased Member awareness

This has been achieved via committee meetings, briefings, mailings and the active involvement of members in LAC issues.

Pilot authority for 'Taking Care of Education Project'

Taking Care of Education is the first project in England to compare policy and practice in improving educational opportunities and outcomes for LAC. Key to this project was the appointment of a Project Officer, based in the Chief Executive's Department, who takes a 'whole authority approach' to the education of LAC. The idea was to see what could be achieved by having a 'champion' for children in care, but without replacing or undertaking any of the authority's statutory duties.

Mapping exercise

A major 'mapping' event was held in December 2003, which brought together staff from the health, education, social services and voluntary sectors to map all posts, initiatives, policies, groups and committees specific to looked after children.

'Changing professional practice'

Carer training in literacy

Provision of training for residential staff and foster carers, using a variety of methods, in order to help them support children's reading and to understand modern teaching methods in schools, including the National Literacy Association 'Reading Roadshow'.

Work Shadowing

Opportunities for teaching staff, social workers and residential workers to see each other's working environment in an attempt to break down organisational barriers and improve working relationships and communication.

'Directly supporting educational progress'

Annual Award ceremony

High profile education reward event each summer term to boost morale and motivation of children.

GCSE reward scheme

Financial rewards for GCSEs and extra rewards for grades above those predicted.

Outward bound programmes

Programmes made available for school age LAC and care leavers through working with the Leisure Department.

Learning mentor for looked after children disengaged from school

Provision of a one-to-one worker who builds relationships with young people with long-term attendance problems.

London Borough of Harrow - adopting a variety of approaches

The case of Harrow highlights a range of areas, which contribute to improving educational attainment of looked after children.

1. Corporate Parenting Principles

These principles guide the Education and Social Services Departments. Services across the two departments have produced written statements as to how the education of LAC will be supported in relation to policy and practice.

2. School Admissions policy - LAC Prioritised

The LEA has amended its school admissions policy to allow LAC priority for admission to its schools from September 2004.

3. Corporate Parenting

A Corporate Parenting Members Group has been established. This is a cross-party group of members, chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Social Services, who take an active interest in the education of LAC and provide a lead for officers on the development of local initiatives. Members have been briefed as to their role as Corporate Parents.

4. Multi-disciplinary Training

Multi-disciplinary training has been developed for Designated Teachers, Social Workers, Residential Social Workers, Foster Carers and Education Staff.

5. Personal Education Plans

An audit of the first generation of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) has been undertaken and recommendations made. Specific training has been developed and delivered to Social Workers on effective PEPs completion.

6. Literacy

In collaboration with the National Literacy Association, the importance of

supporting the development literacy for LAC has been promoted via a number of 'Reading Roadshows'. Training for Foster Carers and Residential Social Workers has been developed and delivered by Curriculum Advisers, on how literacy and numeracy are taught in schools and how to support the development of literacy and numeracy skills at home.

7. Educational Psychologist

The creation of an Educational Psychologist post that has a specific remit for Looked After Children. The focus of this post is to support LAC to enable them to become more resilient and self confident in educational contexts. The Educational Psychologist also provides advice to out of authority schools where Looked After Children attend.

8. A Book of My Own

This scheme, developed by the Who Cares? Trust, was also piloted as a means of increasing the awareness of carers as to the importance of supporting reading for pleasure.

9. Leisure pass

A free pass allowing LAC access to local leisure facilities was also successfully piloted. A concessionary card is to be made available.

10. Internet access

Local Children's Homes and the Leaving Care Team have been provided with computer internet access, for use by LAC.

11. Libraries

Children's Homes have been stocked with books chosen by young people and have been encouraged to create libraries within the homes. 'Welcome Packs' promoting the benefits of library membership are sent to all looked after children in Harrow.

12. Youth participation worker

The appointment of a Youth Participation Worker, based in the Youth and Community Service and part funded through the Gatsby Project, who undertakes work to promote the involvement of young people in specific and mainstream youth activities and the Harrow Youth Forum.

13. Teacher for looked after children

The appointment of a Teacher for LAC who has the specific remit of providing interim educational input for children who are awaiting an educational placement within the 20-day rule period and supporting their integration into school.

14. After school club

The piloting of an after school club, running an evening a week for LAC. The club met in a local library and the children had access to board games, arts and crafts, snooker, table football and all of the library's resources including access to the internet.

Kirklees Borough Council - raising attainment through joint working

Kirklees has had some success in raising attainment through joint working. This was achieved via an initiative focusing initially on young people in care and young people in residential care. It was jointly developed by a partnership between service managers from Education Access, Education Social Work Service, Social Services Children and Families Department and Routeways to Success, a single regeneration budget-funded project in Kirklees.

The principal objectives of the initiative were:

- to establish joint working at all levels;
- ensure that data is accurate, useful and shared by Education and Social Services;
- establish effective procedures and ensure that practice follows the agreed procedures;
- provide advocacy and support for young people and their carers experiencing difficulties in accessing education;
- offer training for Education and Social Services staff;
- raise the profile of education for children and young people in public care amongst Social Services and Education staff, governors and elected members and promote a positive attitude towards children and young people in care.

An 'Education Support Team' for children and young people in public care was formed to take these objectives forward. This consists of one Education Social Worker, one teacher co-ordinator and one full-time equivalent support worker.

The key factors in achieving effective joint working were:

- a commitment to joint approaches in principle and financial terms from senior managers in Education and Social Services;
- an 'anchor person' to ensure that plans are put into practice and that the pace is maintained;
- a balance of grass-roots work with young people and professionals and work at a strategic and policy level;
- an emphasis on building networks and working relationships;
- a high profile for the principle of corporate responsibility.

Hampshire County Council - developing strategies for raising attainment

Hampshire County Council Education Support Service has developed a range of strategies for raising attainment levels of young people in care. These strategies cover two main areas:

1. Looking After Literacy Strategy

This is a partnership with the National Literacy Association. The strategy aims to improve reading skills of children in residential and foster care. This involves:

- Literacy targets included in the Quality Protects Management Action Plan.
- Addressing poor literacy levels identified by specialist support teachers for looked after young people.
- Additional books donated by the National Literacy Association given to children's homes and foster carers.
- A week-long literacy summer school for 25 young people in care aged 10-13 years.
- Provision of a training day for carers and children's home staff on literacy.
- A research project to raise the literacy levels of the two parallel groups of children in foster care and residential care.

2. Supporting Attendance - through a carers/children's home education policy

This policy aims to ensure consistency through a whole local authority approach and success through wide ownership of the policy. The policy was prepared in partnership with young people, carers, school staff, social workers and specialist support service.

It sets out a number of specific objectives regarding carers' commitment to schools:

- ensure that education is given the highest priority;
- prepare an Education Plan within seven days of a young person becoming looked after;
- provide clear lines of communication;
- maintain daytime routines that support education;
- recognise and reward educational achievement;
- establish an education day for looked after young people who are not attending school;
- support and encourage young people in completing coursework and homework;
- develop resources that support young people's education;
- attend meetings and events at schools.

In return, schools are expected to match carers' expectations of them including:

- contribute to, and maintain, an Education Plan;
- feedback positive achievements as well as concerns;
- develop an increased awareness of the needs of looked after young people;
- understand and support young people with temporary difficulties;

- establish a clear communications structure between school and home;
- provide carers with written information and school policies;
- supply work for young people excluded from school;
- attend key meetings held by social services.

Surrey County Council - supporting and prioritising education attainment of children in public care by providing additional funding

As part of developing strategies to support the education of children and young people in public care, Surrey LEA has allocated additional funding for children in the care through a change in the Local Management of Schools (LMS) formula. Since April 1999, 150 young people in public care in secondary schools received an additional weighting of £500. This allocation will occur on an annual basis. The funding provides supply cover for approximately four days per year for the nominated teacher in school. In addition, the extra funding aims to:

- maintain an up-to-date register of looked after pupils;
- liaise with social services;
- formulate and disseminate individual education plans each term;
- provide induction for new pupils;
- provide counselling if appropriate;
- attend an annual half-day Surrey conference and other training;
- keep abreast of good practice, both locally and nationally;
- raise the profile of looked after pupils in their school.

Bedfordshire County Council - promoting educational achievement via Personal Education Plans (PEP)

Bedfordshire LEA has formed a multi-agency group of officers to promote the educational achievement of young people in care. It was recognised that one way to enhance educational opportunities for children in public care was the PEP. As part of this system each school is required to name a teacher who keeps a register of all young people in care in the school and a record of their achievements and needs. This aims to alert care professionals to any potential problems so that they can try to intervene at an early stage to support the child, school and carer.

Children receive a plan as they come into the care system or one month before their care plans are reviewed. PEPs contains all the essential information about the child from the Department of Health LAC materials and also information for both school and home about key actors such as parents, social workers, foster carers, residential social workers, link teachers and Head of Year / Class teachers and contact number for each of these individuals.

The plan also requires a teacher to sit with the child and review progress, taking account of the child's views, and recording both the teacher's and the child's views where they differ. This process helps the teacher and child clarify their perceptions about what the child is achieving. The child is asked to set targets with the teacher and carer during the education planning meeting, but this is discussed with the child beforehand so that they are ready and able to contribute

to the discussion.

The information from the education planning meeting and the PEP is used at children's Care Review to provide accurate educational information to aid discussion and decision-making. The Plan is reviewed every term and a new education planning meeting held, usually at the school. Any SEN reviews also inform the Education Planning meeting and vice versa, helping to give a multi-agency perspective to the two review systems.

A useful aspect of the PEP is that it enables all key actors to be clear about the child's understanding of their educational progress and aspirations. It also highlights who holds which responsibilities, so that at each term time review meetings progress can be clearly measured.

Oxfordshire County Council - practical help for excluded pupils or those without educational provision through the Connect project

Connect is one of a number of projects set up to improve the educational opportunities of LAC. It provides immediate practical help for pupils who have been excluded or are without any educational provision, in order that a long-term Education Plan can be devised.

Methods of work

The project can be accessed immediately by any interested party (e.g. schools, carers, Education Social Workers etc.) and pupils can be of any age and from any sector. Referrals to date have included pupils between the ages of 10 and 15 years and have come from Pupil Referral Units, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties schools and out-of-county placements, as well as mainstream schools. Connect has been funded for one year to provide morning educational sessions for up to six pupils per day. Afternoon sessions consist of group work, meetings, re-integrating the pupil into school, supporting the pupil once back at school, exam support and/or other preparation deemed necessary. At the end of their involvement in the project most pupils return to an educational placement but the minimum outcome is still five hours of home tuition.

Results

In its first 18 months, the project worked with 59 children from foster and residential care, all of whom had a history of fixed and / or permanent exclusions and poor attendance. Average attendance at the scheme has been 80%, with all young people demonstrating significant improvements based on individual comparisons with previous attendance. No care placements broke down while the young people concerned were attending the project.

After Connect, 70% of the young people were successfully re-integrated into full-time education in mainstream or special schools and 20% to pupil referral units. The project has been instrumental in identifying problems within and between education and social services and in enabling the right resources to be accessed.

London Borough of Merton - achieving the best attainment levels for Looked After Children

Merton achieved the highest performance nationally (35%) for looked after children in relation to achieving five GCSEs or equivalent at grade A*-C grade. Merton easily outperformed the only two other local authorities in England who have more than one-in-five of their children achieving such grades, these being Dorset (27%) and Westminster (21%). The Council claims that its performance is due to a number of factors including:

- A dedicated team called 'Chances' who oversee education of children in public care.
- 'Flying Tutors' who provide one to one private tuition on a subject a child requests.
- A Corporate Parents Committee made up of Members who monitor all academic activity.
- Joined up planning between Education and Social Services to ensure children are taught as close to home as possible.
- A commitment to keep 'our' children in the best school locally rather than an available school.

Other factors that may also contribute to Merton's performance include:

- An active Chair of Corporate Parents Committee who has instituted a series of corporate parenting seminars covering a range of services provided by the Council.
- The creation of a Listening to Children Officer post (through the Quality Protects programme). The officer aims to develop mechanisms by which LAC can be more fully involved in the business of planning and delivering services, and establish closer communication links for those children and young people.
- An Ace Leisure card scheme providing LAC with free access to a limited range of the borough's leisure facilities throughout the summer holidays.
- A joint Libraries / Children's and Young People's Services working group of officers and members has been exploring ways of supporting both LAC and their carers.
- Provided LAC with independent sources of advocacy and representation. In this regard a contract has been let with Jigsaw, a local voluntary organisation for children.
- A celebrating success event is being planned to mark the achievement of LAC both in education, and in other non-academic fields.

Factors affecting educational achievement - the pupils' perspective

11.10 A recent report produced by Ofsted highlighted a range of factors, which affected the educational achievement of LAC identified by the young people themselves. This information provides a valuable insight into the minds and thinking of young looked after people. The factors identified include:

- A school where their educational history and the present circumstances as a

- young person in public care is known and understood by relevant teachers;
- An adult in the school who can keep confidences and act as unofficial counsellor (this person is not necessarily the named teacher and, for the arrangement to work well, is likely to be someone chosen by the young person);
- Experience of teachers who are aware of the fact that the young person is in public care but do not attach a stigma or have under-expectations;
- Being treated as any other young person, for example not having allowances made for bad behaviour or not completing homework in circumstances where any other pupil would be in trouble;
- An 'escape system' to allow the young person to withdraw when the pressure becomes too great;
- Continuity of support from a social worker who is interested in school work;
- A commitment from the foster carer or a member of staff in the children's home to accompany the young person on the first day in a new school and to attend school events;
- A core of people in the children's homes present before and after school to provide support for homework and take an interest in school activities - although it must be recognised that residential workers in children's homes have to work to a rota system;
- Remaining in the home area, rather than being moved from the school and sent to accommodation and schooling miles from friends;
- Access to a normal range of facilities available to young people who live at home, including a computer.

Information about Best Practice obtained from other Sources

National Conference – London, March 2006

11.11 At a national conference about the education of Looked After Children held in London in March 2006, delegates heard about the approach to supporting the education of Looked After Children in Hampshire. The driving force for the development of services in Hampshire had been Section 52 of the Children Act, 2004 (which imposes a statutory duty on local authorities to promote and support the education of Looked After Children). The Act contains provisions in relation to:

- Role of Director of Children's' Services and Lead Member
- Inspection
- Support, achievement and aspirations
- Securing appropriate education
- Admissions
- Exclusions
- Personal Education Plans
- Supporting Looked After Children in Custody
- Support for Carers

Section 52 of the 2004 Act only requires schools to "co-operate".

11.12 Delegates were provided with details of the position in Hampshire as follows:

Background

- 1147 Looked After Children
- A multi-disciplinary team of 18 full time and 2 part time staff (including a dedicated data officer)
- Budget of £850,000 per annum
- The Team provides advice and acts as a portal for Looked After Children issues

Avoiding too much time out of school

- A Children Looked After Support Panel (multi-agency), which dealt with issues holistically (i.e. resolving transport, admissions, special educational needs etc.)
- Area Co-ordinators who acted as brokers
- A protocol for hard to place pupils in relation to secondary schools

Lives characterised by Instability

- PEPs which align both care and education planning
- Close working with schools to support children at risk of exclusion
- Appeals process against all permanent exclusions
- Training for designated teachers
- Intensive support for Year 6 pupils during transition to secondary school

Insufficient help if young people get behind

- Home work clubs
- Development of e-learning and virtual classrooms (particularly useful for excluded pupils)

Support for carers

- Specific training for carers about the importance of education
- Foster carer support surgeries
- Half termly meetings with education representatives in all children's homes
- Decent designated spaces in Children's Homes to do homework
- Family learning programmes

Unmet health needs

- A designated nurses forum
- Annual health assessments
- Strategies to support the holistic needs of the child

Training

- Training for designated teachers in Hampshire (540 schools) is undertaken at

- a County-wide Conference (150 teachers had attended the last conference)
- There are also regional clusters of designated teachers who meet termly and each region is supported by a designated key worker from the Educational Support Team
- A video presentation/training pack about Looked After Children had been produced in conjunction with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (the training pack and a copy of the video were later supplied). The video was felt to be extremely useful and a good tool for training.

Out of Hours Learning

- 11.13 Sue Dean from Nottinghamshire outlined the work underway with Looked After Children in relation to out of hours learning. Nottinghamshire had been selected (together with Kirklees and Greenwich) to pilot work in this area. The programme had been designed around what young people wanted and had begun with consultation and engagement with Looked After Children. The aim of the project was to provide every Looked After Child in the Authority's area with access to at least 1 out of school hours project per week.
- 11.14 The results of the consultation revealed that young people did not want to do "exotic" or necessarily expensive projects out of school, but were interested in a wide range of recreational/learning experiences. Because of the geographical nature of the County, projects were not county-wide but very much community based. Out of school learning was one the items highlighted on social worker checklists to query at all supervision meetings. Nottinghamshire had been the first local authority to gain the National Youth Agency Quality in Study Support Programme accreditation for its Looked After Children Virtual School. It was felt that the programme had contributed significantly to the development of Looked After Children and promoted better school attendance.

Educational Achievement of Looked After Children Audit Commission Toolkit

- 11.15 At the March 2006 Looked After Children National Conference, delegates heard about the Audit Commission Toolkit which allows local authorities to carry out rigorous self-assessments of outcomes and processes linked to the educational achievement of Looked After Children. Although the toolkit has been in existence for some years, it has recently been updated to reflect the latest advice and guidance. The Toolkit provides advice and information about the statutory guidance and relevant Key Lines of Enquiry (for Comprehensive Performance Assessment and Joint Area Review processes) as well as relevant document references, a case file tracking section and Action Plan feature. Delegates were advised that the toolkit was useful in terms of self-assessment prior to Joint Area Reviews which are undertaken as part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process for local authorities. The toolkit can be accessed at:

www.audit-commission.gov.uk/education/lactoolkit

Members of the Working Group were advised that use of the toolkit in County Durham was being considered.

Good practice in a Children's Home Setting – Hampshire

11.16 At the national conference, reference was made to a study of best practice in Children's Homes undertaken in Hampshire arising from issues about the educational performance of Looked After Children in Children's Homes. The study found that there were a number of factors which contributed to successful education in a Children's Home setting:

- The leadership of the manager – commitment to a culture stressing the importance of education and its incorporation into a statement of purpose for the Children's Home and ethos supported by all staff.
- A member of staff who takes an educational lead.
- Members of staff who build strong relationships with the schools attended by young people in their care.
- Clear systems, routines and policies, including:
 - Quiet time every evening
 - Activities linked "virtue of the week" e.g. honesty
 - Homes conducting normal school day timetables when children are excluded. This is effective at demonstrating to children that exclusion is not the "easy way out."
- Staff talk to children about their day on return from school.
- Children are placed in separate schools so they are seen as individuals and can form friendships outside of the Home
- Children are rewarded with praise for showing good attitudes towards school. If children attend school for a whole year without exclusion, they are rewarded with a bicycle!

How does County Durham Compare in Terms of Best Practice?

11.17 Officers from Education and Social Care and Health felt that many of the issues highlighted as best practice in other Authorities already operated in County Durham. There were however, some areas that might merit further consideration and the following comments were submitted to the Working Group:

- **A strong Corporate Parenting Panel which Champions Looked After Children issues** - The Corporate Parenting Panel shows a very active interest in both the education and welfare issues for looked after children, but possible areas for development could include establishing a mechanism for more direct contact with looked after children (foster and residential care) so that educational issues can be discussed and Members can hear the views of young people directly. As part of Regulation 33 visits, it would be useful to include some observations as to how the Home supports education – activities, resources, access to computers etc. This would ensure visits were also monitoring the overall ethos of learning and education within the child's home environment.
- **Integrative support provided by the Access Service when Looked After Children move schools** - The Access Service provides both transitional support and reintegration support for children and young people. When a child is placed in a new school mid term, the Access Service will provide support to the child

and the parent/carer to ensure their integration into school is positive. Support will involve liaising with the child, parents/carers and the school to identify concerns and agree a plan of integration. The worker provides up to 2 sessions support per week over a 6-week period before the integration plan draws to a close. Continued support can sometimes be provided if the child is still unsettled in their new school. Support may involve setting up buddying systems, additional academic support and regular opportunities to discuss progress together with involvement in out of hours activities. The Year 6/7 transition programme to support children transferring into secondary school starts in the summer. The Access member of staff liaises with the young person and the parent/carer to identify thoughts about moving into secondary school. Parents are provided with a Transition guide highlighting the main issues that can affect young people as they move into secondary school. Young people are encouraged to participate in a range of summer activities to help build confidence and prepare them for September. Discussions include helping young people to develop strategies to address some of the issues that they may face when they move into the bigger secondary school environment. Transition support from September is agreed via the PEP process and continues up to Christmas, when the intervention is reviewed. The integration programmes have not been subject to formal evaluation but informal feedback from young people and carers during the PEP review suggests that it is useful in ensuring children feel supported during this vulnerable time.

- **Support for Looked After Children below Year 5** – Access Service key workers support children and young people from Year 5 and upwards. Support from key workers at an earlier stage is not currently possible due to the workload of the team: Key workers are working with caseloads of 50-55 young people. However, the Service does offer educational support to children below year 5 based on a referral basis. Schools, social workers and parents/carers can refer children to the Access Service for academic and /or pastoral support.
- **Support for Foster Carers** – Support is provided by the Access Service to carers, is currently liaising with the Literacy and Numeracy Consultants to deliver training to foster carers on supporting learning and modern teaching techniques. This will then ensure that carers feel more confident in providing practical support to younger children in their home.
- **Multi-disciplinary training events** - The response to training has been varied over the past 18 months. Some training e.g. designated governor and foster carer training has been very well received but other training has been cancelled due to lack of applications e.g. designated teacher training and social worker training. The Service will be piloting a different approach to school based training after Easter in which combined Governor and Teacher training programmes will be arranged on a geographical basis throughout the year. Opportunities will also be highlighted for whole and cluster school based training. All Information packs are also currently being re written to acknowledge new guidance and legislation.
- **A Voice for Looked After Children** - The main mechanism for feedback from young people on educational issues is via:

- Ongoing communication with the key workers
- The PEP process and subsequent reviews

The involvement of young people on Service development is also via feedback from staff involved with looked after children. However systems for more direct involvement are being considered as the monitoring mechanism for the Service is amended.



- **Support for IT provision** - No financial support is provided, although a training programme for carers on IT is being arranged in partnership with Study Support and will take place in the summer term
- **Recognising the achievement of LAC** – The achievement of looked after children is recognised as part of a layered approach:
 - Certificates and vouchers presented when progress against PEP targets is evident
 - Out of hours activities arranged as part of a reward system
 - Phone calls to parents and carers to highlight successes of their children
 - Care in Durham arrange an Achievement Evening on an annual basis to recognise achievements of looked after children (although this is not appealing to children who do not want to be recognised as looked after).
 - No financial rewards are currently offered to Looked After Young People for educational achievement.
- **Homework Support** - A flying tutor is being piloted in 2 Children's Homes from after half term. Course work and homework is also supported via the Access Service but it must be acknowledged that this support cannot always

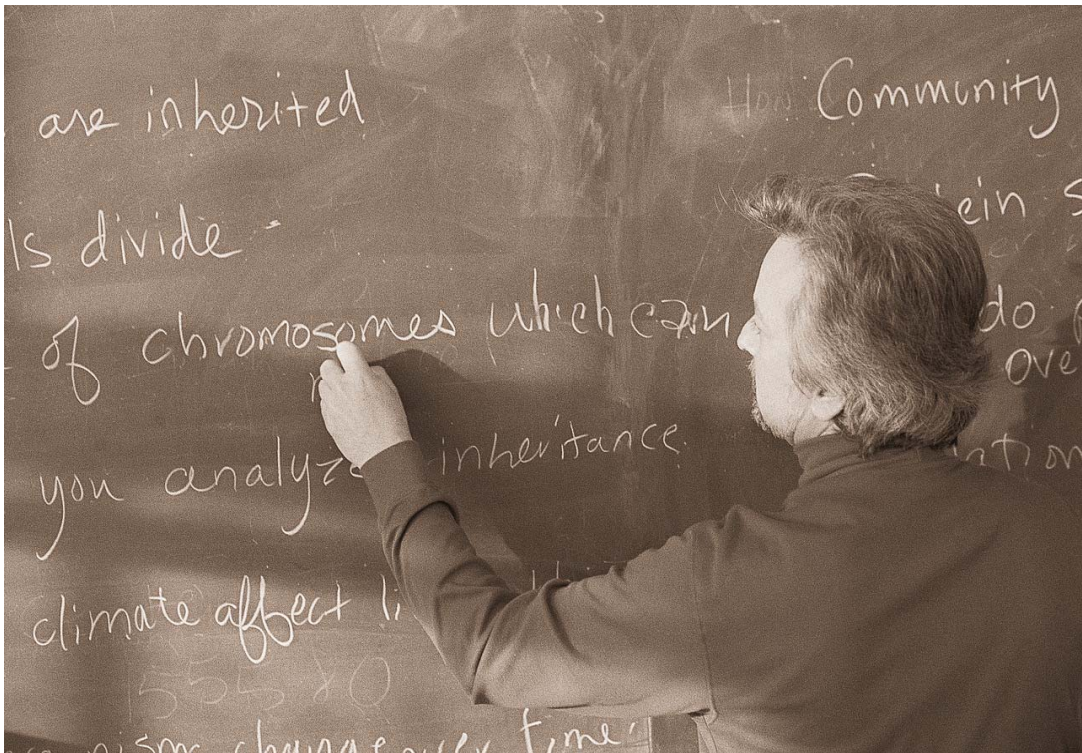
be arranged within the timescales for the work to be completed

- **Funding for the Designated Teacher responsibility in schools** - This is largely an individual school decision. In Secondary schools the responsibilities are largely attached to a post that has TLR allowances e.g. SENCO or Social Inclusion Co-ordinators and in primary schools it is usually the Head teacher who undertakes the role. The most important issue within schools relates to the difficulty in teachers being released to attend training and to be involved in areas of development for looked after children.

Section Twelve – Independent Sector Provision to Support the Education of Looked After Children

Background

- 12.1 There are a small number of independent providers who deliver support to local authorities who choose to commission services similar to that provided in-house by Durham County Council's Access Service. Perhaps the largest of these is the National Teaching and Advisory Service (NT&AS).
- 12.2 Considering value for money and competition is an important aspect of any scrutiny project. The NT&AS submitted the following evidence to the Scrutiny Working Group during the project.



The National Teaching and Advisory Service

- 12.3 The NT&AS was established in July 1998. There are 16 regional offices employing just over 110 staff who currently work with around 700 looked after children nationally. Some 90% of the staff are qualified teachers.
- 12.4 The NT&AS work within the inclusion agenda, providing qualified and experienced teachers to work directly with young people with the aim of promoting education that is accessible to Looked after Children. Direct work with young people and their carers comprises over 90% of the organisation's activity. They offer amongst their services:
- A partnership service which complements purchasers own resources

- Comprehensive education background reports
 - Liaison with all relevant agencies, parents and carers
 - Catch up tuition and specialist teaching at all key stages
 - Training for professional staff
 - Telephone help lines for foster carers on education support issues
- 12.5 In addition the NT&AS organise national and regional conferences; publish professional documents for foster carers, residential workers, social workers and parents and ensure that services provided to local authorities are effective.
- 12.6 Other aims involve acting as a 'critical friend' to support local authorities and the independent sector on a range of multi agency and strategic issues; offering training and support to childcare professionals at all levels of management; and providing an on-line learning and inclusion service for children and young people.
- 12.7 In terms of specific types of provision, NT&AS:
- Undertake research into educational, social and health issues to provide an education background report with recommendations to inform future planning (undertaken by NT&AS teacher)
 - Provide assessments of academic attainment and potential preferred learning style, attitude to education and learning (teacher)
 - Liaise with the local authority regarding possible provision in the area and the routes for accessing the appropriate provision (teacher)
 - Assist in preparing young people for school placement including liaison with receiving school and direct work, on social, emotional and behavioural level and academic level (or both) with young person to ease transition to school (teacher and education support worker/ mentor in some areas)
 - Provide direct support to ensure successful school placements, which may include bridging the gap where special needs personnel need to be appointed by receiving school (teacher)
 - Provide Inclusion Plans for all young people involving all relevant parties, these are formally reviewed on at least a half termly basis (teacher or ESW / learning mentor)
 - Formally report to commissioning agency of work carried out and outcomes. Regularity of such reporting to be agreed with all commissioning agencies individually to meet their needs (team manager, regional manager or director)
 - Provide training for schools, foster carers, parents, residential social workers as appropriate (teachers and managers)
 - Give advice and support to schools as appropriate (teachers, managers)
 - Act in a consultative/critical friend role (director, regional manager, team

manager)

12.8 Training provided by NT&AS includes:

- Introduction to NT&AS and working together.
- Introduction to schools and the education system.
- The education of Looked After Children.
- Inclusion / exclusion.
- Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- Other training may be provided on specific matters (e.g. ASD)
- as requested and appropriate.
- Ongoing advice on how to support young people in their learning.
- Links to services and personnel in local authorities.
- Home visits and support to learning.
- Implementation of routines and systems including timetabling, record keeping, reward systems.
- Facilitating the planning of areas to work and appropriate resources.
- Ensuring that management systems are in place to meet Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) recommendations.
- Encouraging and supporting the development of extra curricular activities.

12.9 The NT&AS is currently working with local authorities in Buckinghamshire, Derbyshire, Lancashire, Liverpool, Sandwell, Suffolk and Trafford. A brief outline of some of the types of work being undertaken in those authorities is set out below:

Buckinghamshire: Work to ensure that Looked After Children who have been excluded from school remain learning and return to mainstream school as soon as possible (spot purchase scheme).

Derbyshire: Work alongside Multi Agency Support Team (MAST) to support the learning of 'hard to place' pupils, 60% of whom are in the looked after system. They ensure that the transition of educational placements is smooth and that SEN support the child's learning whilst the placement is identified. They also work alongside carers and parents to develop strategies of coping with challenging behaviour and learning.

Lancashire: Currently working with 30 young people mostly from Key Stage 4 accessing college, flexible education package and special delivery of subjects. NT&AS work directly with pupils with educational needs where there is a delay in accessing provision, or following permanent exclusion from their special school. Spot purchase arrangements.

Liverpool: Support for Looked After Children in mainstream secondary education and preparation of GCSE work for year 11 pupils. NT&AS also provide advice and support to Liverpool's virtual school for LAC. Training for social workers to address difficulties at Key Stage 2/3 transition.

Sandwell: Working with the inclusion agenda with disaffected pupils referred via SEN.

Suffolk: Working with a range of children and young people to provide direct support for school inclusion and multi-agency team working.

Trafford: Collaborative working with vulnerable young people's multi-agency team, including identified Key Stage 4 pupils, most of whom are Looked After.

Suggested Benefits of the National Teaching Advisory Service

12.10 In its submission to the County Council, NT&AS stated that all of its staff are highly trained, supported and motivated and are effective in sharing knowledge and information, leading to effective educational outcomes for young people. Much is made of the ability of the organisation to quickly and effectively communicate across all agencies and because of its "independence" to be able to be creative in developing solutions to solving problems. A large amount of the NT&AS teacher time is spent in school and feedback is provided quickly to young people, staff and parents/carers.

National Teaching Advisory Service Information Material

12.11 NT&AS have a comprehensive website and produce a considerable amount of written material of a high standard, supplying guidance for social workers, carers, residential workers, and parents. Publications by NT&AS include handbooks containing information explaining issues such as:

- Admissions,
- Types of schools,
- National curriculum
- Teaching methods
- Exams and grading
- Homework
- Governing bodies in schools
- Special educational needs (SEN),
- Home-school contact
- Policies, and
- Inclusion and exclusion.

Evidence Submitted

12.12 As part of its submission to the Working Group, NT&AS provided a considerable amount of supporting documentation, both qualitative and quantitative, about the services provided. Copies of the documentation were provided to Members of the Working Group at the meeting. Discussions have also been initiated with representatives in a number of the Authorities in which NT&AS is providing services. Feedback was generally good.

12.13 Because of the commercial nature of the services provided by NT&AS, it was not possible to obtain details of any costings for the services provided to local authorities by the Company. This has not allowed any detailed consideration to

be given to comparison with in-house service provision on which to base any recommendations. Nevertheless, NT&AS appears to offer a resource for those local authorities or other agencies who wish either to provide a service which is not in-house, or to provide specialist services in addition to any existing in-house provision. As such, the company offers local authorities choice in determination of provision.

Issues

- 12.14 Members of the Working Group felt that existing in-house provision, which has been in place for some years, appeared to be serving the needs of the Council well. However, independent sector provision provides opportunities for flexibility and the opportunity to buy-in specialist services on an ad-hoc basis should this be required.

Section Thirteen – Conclusions

Introduction

- 13.1 Durham County Council, as a corporate parent to over 400 Looked After Children and young people, has a duty to care for them in exactly the same way than any good parent would care for their own children.
- 13.2 The majority of young people who are Looked After are not in care because they wish to be, or because of something they themselves have done. Many young people who are in the Council's care are there because they are victims. They may have been abused or neglected, from households where parents or carers may be experiencing problems with drink or drugs, or where relationships are breaking down. Many younger children in these situations know no differently. For them, this sort of life may seem normal. They still give their love unconditionally to their parents/carers. When the statutory agencies become involved and children are removed from situations of abuse and neglect, they are often confused, suffering emotional trauma and loss.
- 13.3. One of the Senior Social Workers who gave evidence to the Working Group early in project drew some contrasts between the lives of the majority of people and those of Looked After Children as follows:

“We are all on a ladder of life. Most of us have a ladder which has a steady upwards incline, and although we may occasionally be faced with wind or rain, generally the climb is in fair conditions. On the way, we gain attainments – GCSEs, Degrees and professional qualifications and we continue the climb. Going up the ladder odd rungs may be loose or worn, but we are doing the climb in broad daylight and can spot the hazards.

It's different for some others, and Looked After Children would be part of this. Their ladder does not have a steady incline. In fact, it may be perpendicular or, at other times, flat on the ground. Rain and wind are an almost constant companion, except when the climb is in glaring sunshine or in the dark. Rungs may be worn, broken and missing and in the conditions, never seen, until the person climbing the ladder is upon them. Attainment is something that other people have time for.”

Key Issues

- 13.4 The evidence submitted by CAMHS, the STEPS Therapeutic Service and the Education Access Service referred to the emotional backdrop against which Looked After Children are expected to achieve academically. Loss of parents and family, loss of friends and the lack of a support network (often from the loss of friends from the schools they are used to) are all factors which can influence how well Looked After Children do and not just in educational terms. The Working Group heard both from the Access Service Manager and at the national conference in 2006 about the main barriers identified in the Social Exclusion Unit

Report (2003) which impact on the educational attainment of Looked After Children:

- 13.5 Support to overcome the above barriers requires input from many agencies in close partnership working. Members of the Working Group formed a view early in the project that they needed to look at all aspects of provision for Looked After Children and would take evidence from a wide range of providers. Details of evidence are listed in Appendices 1 and 2 of the report.
- 13.6 Whilst the importance of Looked After Children doing well in terms of educational attainment is of great importance to the Council (as it would be to any parent), local authorities are also driven by targets set by national government. The Working Group heard at the beginning of the project from officers from Social Care and Health and Education about the complexities of some of these targets. Such targets refer to Year 11 Looked After Children; others to Care Leavers (who can be much older and may have had the opportunity to take further GCSEs at College); some may only apply to those who have been in the care system continuously for a minimum of twelve months prior to the exams, and so on.
- 13.7 The Working Group received historical data from Education officers showing that the cohorts of Looked After Children in County Durham in Year 11 who take GCSEs are comparatively small – typically between 30-40. This means that the difference between a small number of young people doing either better or worse than predicted in GCSE exams can have a significant impact on performance percentage figures. Another factor is the number of Looked After Children in each cohort who have Special Educational Needs. The Working Group was advised that, despite our best efforts, there would always be a small number of young people who would not be able to achieve academically.
- 13.8 Because of the range of factors which influence the educational attainment of Looked After Children, there are invariably a number of agencies who are involved in supporting young people and partnership working should be greatly enhanced in the next few years with the establishment of a Children's and Young People's Services Authority. The Working Group felt that all of the professional staff and carers it met during the course of the project were fully committed and dedicated to their respective roles and would like to thank all of those who play such an important part in a sometimes challenging environment. The recent complimentary inspection of the Fostering Service by the Commission for Social Care Inspection confirms this. But there is always room for improvement, and the role of scrutiny is to look in depth at the services provided and to make recommendations which, hopefully, will make a positive difference for the young people in our care.

Themes

- 13.9 In considering the evidence, the Working Group felt that a number of key themes had emerged, around which recommendations could be based. These were:

The Council as Corporate Parent

- 13.10 The Working Group observed first-hand the operation of the Corporate Parenting

Panel by attending one of its meetings and it recognises the conscientious way in which the Panel undertakes its role. However, less than 25% of the membership of the Council sits on the Panel and some members expressed a view during the course of the project that, other Councillors could do more to fulfil the corporate parenting role which falls to **all** members of the Council. Accordingly, efforts need to be made to highlight the work of the Panel and recruit new members. Whilst the core membership of the Panel is made up of Councillors in their corporate parent role, the Working Group wondered whether scope might exist to enlarge the membership of the Panel through co-options of additional members from the wider community. There would be a need, however, in pursuing this course of action to consider recruitment and selection mechanisms to ensure that young people are appropriately safeguarded.

- 13.11 Although the role of the Corporate Parenting Panel has been the subject of a recent report to Cabinet, the Working Group believes that there is also a need to clarify the role and operation of the Corporate Parenting Panel within the Council's Constitution, as it currently is not reflected in the Constitution.
- 13.12 In the officer feedback we received about best practice in other local authorities, it was suggested that corporate parents undertaking Regulation 33 Visits might be encouraged to observe how the education of Looked After Children resident in homes was being supported. Members felt this was an excellent idea and are making a recommendation in support of this proposal.
- 13.13 The young care leavers who spoke with members of the Working Group at a consultation event in October 2005 knew little about what a corporate parent was, or what a councillor did. Many of them said they had not met a corporate parent. They suggested that more Regulation 33 visits should take place whilst they were "at home" – i.e. on evenings, weekends and during holiday periods. It was also suggested that the corporate parents produce some literature or even a DVD about who they are and what they do, which could be circulated to Looked After Children, and particularly for those in residential care prior to Regulation 33 Visits (which would, of course, continue to be unannounced). The Working Group understands that the suggestion about better information is actively being considered and would fully endorse what is being proposed. Although the Group recognises the many and varied time demands upon Councillors, it would also urge the Corporate Parenting Panel to consider undertaking more evening, weekend or holiday time visits.
- 13.14 Young people, as well as carers, told the Working Group they would like to have opportunities to meet corporate parents face to face in informal settings (perhaps with music and refreshments). The Working Group believes this suggestion has merit and that consideration should be given to bi-annual or quarterly events of this nature.

The Role of Designated Teachers and Governors

- 13.15 It is teachers who are in the front line, supporting those Looked After Children who are pupils in their schools. Governors too have a key role in championing the needs, not just of Looked After Children, but also the teachers who support them. Early in the project, members received information about the database of

Governors from which it was apparent that some entries were out of date. When undertaking the survey of Governors, because of the way in which the data was held, it was necessary to send out paper questionnaires. Whilst the Group heard that information was provided to teachers and governors by a number of means (including the Extranet), it felt that there was a need for a more accurate, regularly updated database of governors to be maintained and that efforts should be obtained email contact details (although it is appreciated that not all governors will have access to email).

- 13.16 Training was a big issue for both governors and teachers. Members observed a training session for designated governors held at Easington one November evening in 2005. Three designated governors had indicated they would be present, but only one attended. The Access Service Manager and a senior colleague delivered the training to the governor who attended (and members of the Working Group present who were all governors themselves). Members did not feel this was the most cost effective way of providing training or best use of senior staff. In the circumstances, the Working Group wondered whether there might be better ways of providing training, such as on-line or by DVD with supporting materials. This would free up some staff time. At a later meeting of the Working Group, Tom Bolton, Senior Scrutiny Officer, played members a training/information DVD about Looked After Children issues produced jointly by Hampshire County Council and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea which the Working Group felt would be an excellent training tool in Durham. The content of the DVD was endorsed by a number of Looked After young people who were present at the evidence session when the DVD was viewed.
- 13.17 Training for teachers was identified as a difficult area in the survey responses to the Working Group with many teachers commenting upon the competing demands on their time. There were mixed messages about when teachers could attend training sessions. Members heard that some teacher training events had been cancelled because of lack of take up. Again the Working Group wondered whether on-line or DVD training material might be developed. In its discussions with young people from Care in Durham, the possibility of some compressed training around "Total Respect" was discussed. Whilst recognising the value of the full course for professional staff, the Group wondered whether such a version could be captured on DVD for use by teachers (and governors) who are not able to attend the full training events.
- 13.18 The report from members who attended the designated governor training event raised issues about networking and better dissemination of information to governors (and teachers). The Working Group is making recommendations about whether this may be promoted by the establishment of virtual (e-mail) networks and on-line discussion forums for both teachers and governors and for the holding of a conference (perhaps annually), which would celebrate and recognise the input by professional staff, governors and carers.
- 13.19 Governors have a role, not just in championing the needs of Looked After Children in the schools on whose Governing Bodies they serve, but also in supporting designated teachers. Recent Government guidance ("Supporting Looked After Learners – A Practical Guide for School Governors" DfES 2006) confirms this role. The Group believes that it would be beneficial if the designated

governors could be reminded (perhaps annually in a newsletter or some other form of communication) about what their role involves. The Working Group also heard that most, if not all, County Councillors were likely to be school governors and is suggesting that all Councillors have a role to play in ensuring that Looked After Children's support is in place in their schools by enquiring about these issues at meetings of Governing Bodies from time to time.

Foster Carers

13.20 It is foster carers who provide a home and some semblance of the normality of family life to those Looked After Children who are placed with them. At the consultation event with carers, a number of issues were raised, including:

- How better links could be forged with designated teachers – inviting teachers to carers group events was suggested.
- Better contact arrangements between carers and schools, particularly where older children are concerned – this was felt to be particularly important in allowing carers to successfully challenge inappropriate exclusions.
- The terminology and professional “jargon” that designated teachers, social workers and Access staff use, which some carers did not understand
- The need for enhanced training to help carers become better conversant with modern teaching methods to enable them to better support young people in their care with tasks such as homework
- Provision of and support with IT equipment. Some carers had computers and internet access, but others did not
- More dialogue between carers and members of the Corporate Parenting Panel to discuss issues of common concern. All carers and members present at the carers consultation event felt they had gained something from having face to face discussions.
- Repeat training in relation to specific areas such as dyslexia and dyspraxia.

13.21 Another issue which came to light after the conclusion of evidence taking was the comments contained in the 2006 Fostering Service Inspection by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) in relation to notice for training events. The Group wishes to reinforce the CSCI finding and is recommending that better notice be provided of training events for carers.

Enhanced Support for Looked After Children and Recognition of Achievement

13.22 There were a large number of issues raised during the project about more direct support for Looked After Children to help them achieve educationally. A number of issues were also raised about the approach that should be employed in recognising achievement.

13.23 The Working Group was particularly struck by the comments of young people about how unsettling moving school was for them. One young person referred to losing her network of friends and having to cope with a syllabus different to that at her previous school – i.e. the book she had been learning for her English literature exams was different at her new school. We feel that remaining at the same school should be a prime consideration when determining placements

unless it is unsafe or sufficiently inconvenient to do so. The Group also wishes to reinforce the need for greater transition support where school moves do have to take place.

- 13.24 Members heard during the project about how Looked After Children can lose out on learning because of exclusions. The Government's recently announced Respect Agenda (elements of which will be encapsulated in the Education Bill and Police and Justice Bill) will require that young people who are excluded will require support at home within a much reduced lead in timescale. However, the Working Group recognised the need for greater support for carers to successfully challenge exclusions in the first place. Some members were also concerned about young people who were "unofficially" excluded by being sent home for short periods of time. This requires further investigation by Access staff and Social Workers when it happens. It should not provide an opportunity for schools to remove young people from learning without due process.
- 13.25 In evidence from the Access Service in early 2006, members heard that 4% of PEPs had still not been returned. The majority of these were for below Year 5 (for whom there is no direct provision by the Access Service other than on referral) and the Group heard that for very young people who are looked after, the majority of designated teachers tended to be Head Teachers. The Group was concerned at the lack of return of these PEPs and also about support for below Year 5's who are looked after, for whom the acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills are key requisites and indicators of how well they will perform in their later education. Whilst members recognise the existing demands upon the Access Service (some of which may also be impacted on by other recommendations in this report), consideration needs to be given as to how these issues can be accommodated within provision.
- 13.26 IT was an issue raised by young people. In the discussions with care leavers some young people seemed to have been adequately catered for (one care leaver had been provided with a laptop). Others had no personal or home provision. Most parents would recognise the value of young people having access to a computer and the internet to support their schoolwork. The Council as a corporate parent should have nor different an approach. The Working Group's views apply equally to Children's Homes as they do to foster carers.
- 13.27 Studying in Children's Homes was another subject raised by care leavers in their discussions with the Working Group. Many of them said how difficult it was to study in Homes on an evening because other young people were "kicking off" and there was no-where quiet for them to go to do their work, Members of the Group were impressed with the Hampshire model which has a period of "quiet time" each evening in its Homes to facilitate study, as well as specific areas within Homes which are dedicated for homework/study. The County Council does have guidance for residential staff about education support for Looked After Children (see appendices) but Members of the Working Group felt this should be reinforced to staff. It is also being suggested to officers that they consider the Hampshire model to determine whether there are any other areas of best practice which might be considered for use in Durham. The Group is also suggesting that Regulation 33 visits place a greater emphasis on assessing the educational "ethos" at individual Children's Homes.

- 13.28 It was clear to the Working Group that, for some young people in the Council's care, there would not be the capability to achieve in strict academic terms. This should in no way diminish the expectations of the Council for those young people to achieve. It means the Council needs to more focused on how it can support such young people to gain vocational skills/qualifications which will enable them to leave care, earn a living and play a full role within society. The Council as a major local employer can play a direct role in this process. The Group heard about the Teenagers to Work scheme which was being considered for introduction by the Council and would fully support this proposal.
- 13.29 The Working Group was impressed with the models for learning for Looked After Children being developed in Nottinghamshire in relation to virtual classrooms and e-learning which have been recognised nationally and feels that consideration should be given to developing similar models of provision in County Durham. This will however be dependent upon suitable IT provision.
- 13.30 Members heard about the benefits for young people who are involved in out-of-school hours activities. Whilst some provision does exist in the County, the Working Group felt that all young people in care should have the opportunity to engage in at least one activity per week and is suggesting that the scope for such opportunities be investigated.
- 13.31 The parents of most young people will recognise, praise and reward educational achievement. The Working Group sees no reason why the Council, in its role as Corporate Parent, should be any different. Looked After Children in Durham are praised and this is passed on to carers and parents, and whilst there are some rewards (certificates etc.), there is no financial recognition of success. Members were interested in the Hampshire model which provides a bicycle to young people in Homes who can go a year without exclusion. In the evidence of best practice submitted by Northumbria University, there were a number of Authorities where recognition of achievement was financial and/or given in a more high profile way at some annual Award event. The Working Group feels these issues should be addressed and believes that in relation to awards, there may be opportunities to seek local or national sponsorship.
- 13.32 Many of the young people whom the Working Group spoke with during the course of the project had been involved with activities provided by Care in Durham. This is a charity which is currently struggling with funding (as many voluntary organisations do), yet it provides a valuable resource for young people in most parts of the County (Easington apart) who are, or have been, looked after. Although the Working Group recognises there are many organisations supporting and promoting the needs of young people (including Investing in Children, to which the Council provides financial support), the Group felt that the Council should consider how it can better support the work of Care in Durham. Following production of the draft Working Group report, members were advised that there were opportunities for Care in Durham to access up to £10,000 of funding from the County Council for its work, subject to submission of a satisfactory business case.
- 13.33 Mentoring of young people who are looked after provides both enhanced social

as well as educational opportunities for young people who are looked after. The Group was pleased to learn of the progress made and developments planned in the Collinwood College scheme which has been well received. Whilst the Group supports the expansion of the scheme, it also believes that there is a role which can be developed for some care leavers in mentoring of younger people who are currently looked after.

- 13.34 In the presentation by officers from the STEPS therapeutic Service, members heard about a review of provision which was underway and vacant posts which were being held pending the outcome. Scrutiny members previously encountered the work of the STEPS service during the Minding the Gap project which looked at the mental health needs of 16-25 year olds and their carers in County Durham. The value of the STEPS Service was recognised at that time a recommendation made about ensuring that there was sufficient capacity within the STEPS Service to meet demands upon it. The Working Group is concerned to ensure that the review of provision will not impact adversely upon the capacity of the STEPS Service to provide support for those Looked After Children (and others with emotional trauma) who so badly need it. Members heard about the ongoing proposals for a more integrated service with health through CAMHS which may address some of these issues and are generally supportive of integration, *if it can be shown to deliver better performance and outcomes for young people.*
- 13.35 During the course of the project an approach was made to Working Group by an independent sector provider in the field of educational support for Looked After Children – the National Teaching and Advisory Service NT&AS). NT&AS has a well developed national network of (primarily) teaching staff, providing support to a number of local authorities, as well as parents and carers. Considerable evidence was provided in support of this. Members of the Working Group felt that the Council's own in-house Access Service provided similar services, but recognised that there may be occasions where independent sector providers such as NT&AS may be able to provide services such as ad-hoc consultancy or additional specific services which either cannot be met by the Council's own in-house provider, or be provided within relevant timescales.
- 13.36 Although not directly linked to the educational attainment of Looked After Children, Members heard in evidence from magistrate members of the Working Group about young people from Children's Homes who were appearing in Court for minor criminal damage offences and it was suggested that the parent of a child would not normally report it to the police for some minor damage within the family home. Changes were being proposed to the way in which these matters were dealt with within the criminal justice system, to minimise appearances in Court, but it was felt that guidance to staff in Children's Homes should be reviewed to avoid involving the criminal justice agencies wherever possible. Members were advised that a new system of restorative justice for tackling these issues in Children's Homes was being pursued, but this needed to be reinforced to staff.
- 13.37 The Working Group heard in evidence from the March 2006 National Conference about Looked After Children that a new Audit Commission toolkit for assessing the educational attainment of Looked After Children had been launched. The Group understood that the model (which is available free of charge on-line) is not currently being used, but is being considered. The Group believes that use of the

toolkit which provides a useful self-assessment tool should be considered. Use of the toolkit would also assist the Council greatly in terms of future Joint Area Reviews/Comprehensive Performance Assessments.

Section Fourteen – Recommendations

Introduction

14.1 The Working Group felt that there were a number of areas where recommendations for improvement should be made. These have been grouped around a number of themes as follows:

- **The role and actions of the Council as Corporate Parent**
- **The functions of Designated Teachers and Governors**
- **The role of Foster Carers**
- **Support for Children who are Looked After and Recognition of Achievement**

Recommendations

The Council as a Corporate Parent

14.2 It is the role of the Council to be responsible for all aspects of care for Looked After Children. This is not just the responsibility of officers and those Councillors who are members of the Corporate Parenting Panel. It is the responsibility of every member of the Council. Whilst the role of the Corporate Parenting Panel has developed over time and the value of the arrangements in County Durham has been recognised in previous Inspection Reports, the Working Group felt that there were still areas for improvement. The Working Group recommends that:

- (a) The role and powers of the Corporate Parenting Panel should be properly codified and incorporated within the Council's Constitution in order to better clarify its purpose.
- (b) Cabinet should consider how additional members of the Corporate Parenting Panel can be recruited. Consideration should be given to whether all Corporate Panel Members need to be County Councillors, although, in considering whether co-optees should be sought, careful regard will need to be given to procedures for recruitment and selection procedures to ensure young people are appropriately safeguarded. It is suggested that a conference, or seminar, following this scrutiny project to highlight the findings might provide a suitable vehicle to recruit additional members of the Council.
- (c) Mechanisms to allow for more direct contact by the Corporate Parenting Panel with Looked After Children (in foster and residential care), and Carers, so that educational issues can be discussed and the respective views of young people and carers can be heard directly should be considered. Young people indicated that they would like to see informal quarterly events (perhaps with music and food provided).
- (d) Regulation 33 visits to Residential Children's Homes should include some observations about how the Home supports education – i.e. activities, resources, access to computers etc. This would ensure visits were also

monitoring the overall ethos of learning and education within the child's home environment.

- (e) Whilst the time demands upon members as corporate parents are recognised and it is important that Regulation 33 visits are unannounced, greater efforts should be made to undertake visits at times when young people will be present, such as evenings, weekends and holiday periods.
- (f) Most young people in care know very little, if anything, about what a corporate parent (or a councillor) is. The production of information material for young people (including a DVD) might help to overcome this. It is understood that the Corporate Parenting Panel is actioning this point.

The Role of Designated Teachers and Governors

14.3 Designated teachers and governors have key roles in championing Looked After Children within the education system. They need to be pro-active in this role, whilst recognising the sensitivities and stigmatisation that being a Looked After Child can bring to young people within school settings. The Group felt on occasions that, whilst the overwhelming majority of designated teachers and governors were conscientious in their role, in some areas it appeared that more could be done. Being a designated teacher for Looked After Children is not easy, given all the other competing demands upon teachers time, but it is a key role and young people who spoke to the Working Group made it clear that having a teacher who cared made "all the difference". Given that scrutiny too is about making a difference, the Working Group recommends that:

- (a) The Access Service should consider how the accuracy of the database of designated governors can be improved, to ensure that all schools have designated governors, that governor details are updated regularly (currently they are only updated annually), and to provide for email contact details for governors wherever possible, which would be useful in terms of disseminating information and networking.
- (b) Training arrangements for newly designated governors and teachers should be reviewed and particularly, the ways in which courses are advertised, and when and where they are held. Whilst face-to-face training will always be preferable, it is time-demanding of Access Service staff. Consideration should be given to the development of on-line or DVD training modules. The DVD recently produced in partnership by Hampshire County Council and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea is an example of good practice in this field and the Working Group commends its use in Durham as part of future training.
- (c) Consideration should be given to developing virtual networks and dedicated web-pages for designated governors and teachers to allow for the sharing of best practice and to continuously reinforce the respective championing roles of governors and teachers in relation to Looked After Children. In feedback from teachers/governors the use of the Council's Extranet for posting information was criticised due to the amount of information on the system.

- (d) Whilst “Total Respect” training has been delivered successfully to a number of professional staff by Looked After Children, the opportunity to develop a less time-intensive training package (perhaps in the form of a DVD) and supporting documentation around the Total Respect agenda, which could be used more widely (and particularly for designated teachers and governors), should be considered.
- (e) The above recommendations should be reinforced by the holding of an (at least) annual conference at which teachers, governors, and other professional staff and carers can come together to share best practice and discuss issues of common concern.
- (f) Most, if not all, County Councillors are school governors. As part of their corporate parenting role, all County Councillors should be encouraged to enquire at meetings of Governing Bodies whether designated governors and teachers are in place at their school(s) and if not, to report this fact to the Access Service for action.
- (g) The Access Service should put in place arrangements to encourage designated governors from time to time (perhaps by annual email or letter) to ensure that they:
 - Are aware of the designated teacher in their school
 - Promote the requirement for the designated teacher to attend appropriate training
 - Know the numbers, ages and educational attainment of Looked After Children in their school and monitor this
 - Make an annual report on Looked After Children issues to the Governing Body (which they share with the Access Service)
- (h) There needs to be proper recognition and reward for the role that designated teachers for Looked After Children undertake within individual schools. Designated governors should champion this and be encouraged to ensure that teachers are properly supported within their schools in this role.

Foster Carers

14.4 It is foster carers who can bring the love and normality of family life to the Looked After Children in their care, but they need ongoing support to do this particularly in relation to ensuring that the young people in their care are receiving a good education. The Working Group recommends that:

- (a) Consideration should be given to procedures which will build closer links between carers and teaching staff. Carers suggested that teaching staff might be invited to carers consultative meetings.
- (b) There should be a review of the procedures in place for ensuring contact between schools and foster carers. Carers saw this as being particularly important, especially when children are older and more independent and

contact between carers and schools tends to diminish. This would also assist when young people are excluded, as carers felt they do not currently receive enough information to allow them to challenge exclusions.

- (c) Designated teachers, Social workers and Access Service staff should be asked to consider carefully the terminologies they use when communicating with carers so as to ensure that they are readily understandable to recipients.
- (d) The Access Service should further develop existing training programmes for carers to ensure that they are fully conversant with modern teaching methods. This will enable carers to more effectively support the young people in their care when helping them with homework. Training for newly recruited foster carers should also be reviewed to ensure that this issue is addressed and there should be greater support for and emphasis on the need for carers to take an even more active role in the education of children in their care. In line with the CSCI 2006 Fostering Service Inspection Report, sufficient notice should be given of training events to allow carers to make arrangements to attend.
- (e) All carers, who do not already have IT equipment in their homes, should be provided with equipment to allow the young people in their care to access the internet and to carry out research linked to their school studies whilst placed with them.
- (f) Procedures should be introduced to allow regular dialogue between carers and the Corporate Parenting Panel (there is a similar recommendation under the Section pertaining to the Panel).
- (g) Dyslexia and dyspraxia are areas where carers felt there was a need for ongoing training and the Access Service should consider re-running the previous courses, again subject to sufficient prior notice.

Enhanced Support for Looked Children and Recognition of Achievement

14.5 Whilst the Working Group acknowledges the considerable amount of support currently provided for Children who are Looked After, a large number of issues were raised in evidence which the Working Group feels merit closer attention. The Group recommends that:

- (a) Wherever possible, when determining placements for children within the Looked After system, a prime consideration by social workers should be stability in terms of the child remaining at their existing school, where it is safe and convenient to do so.
- (b) A review of the mechanisms currently in place to ensure that school moves for Looked After Children take place at the most appropriate time and that additional assistance is given (particularly where a different syllabus is employed in the new school) should be undertaken.

- (c) If it does not already do so, the Access Service should consider how it could more effectively support Looked After Children (and their carers) in appealing against exclusions from school.
- (d) Consideration should be given to reviewing resources within the existing Access Service to ensure that the educational needs of Looked After Children below Year 5 are better promoted in relation to PEPs.
- (e) Cabinet should ask the Director of Children's and Young People's Services to develop a clear and consistent policy in relation to IT provision for Looked After Children, based on the principle that young people should have access to IT facilities (including the internet) both in Residential Children's Homes and in the homes of foster carers with whom they are placed. Whilst this may have resource implications, the Council needs to think innovatively about how such facilities might be provided (i.e. sponsorship). We understand this may currently be under consideration.
- (f) Cabinet should ask the Director of Children's and Young People's Services to explore the feasibility of providing quiet study areas in Children's Residential Homes to allow young people to undertake homework without interruptions.
- (g) An audit of Children's Homes should be undertaken to ensure that residential staff are fully conversant with and consistently apply the procedures for supporting Looked After Children in relation to Education (see Appendix 4). The Working Group's recommendations to the Corporate Parenting Panel about greater scrutiny of education issues when undertaking Regulation 33 visits should help to reinforce this proposal.
- (h) Given the historically poor performance of young people resident in Children's Homes, Children's and Young People's Services should review the existing procedures for educational support of young people who are in such establishments (Appendix 4), in the light of the Hampshire model (i.e. evening "quiet times"), to determine whether any further opportunities exist to improve the support currently provided.
- (i) Whilst the emphasis in supporting the education of Looked After Children should continue to be on the attainment of recognised academic qualifications, the importance of vocational skills should not be overlooked. Consideration should be given to broadening the opportunities for Looked After Children to receive advice about, and access to, vocational courses. This should happen from Year 7 onwards.
- (j) If suitable arrangements are not already in place, the Access Service should encourage Head Teachers to notify the Service if any Looked After Children are not entered for SATs or GCSE exams and the reasons why this has occurred.
- (k) The Access Service should consider how more innovative ways of

providing support to Looked After Children, such as e-learning and “virtual classrooms” can be developed. It is recognised, however, that this will be dependent upon the provision of suitable IT equipment in carers and residential homes.

- (l) The Children’s Service should consider how the attendance by Looked After Children at a minimum of at least one out-of-school-hours activity/event per week can be promoted.
- (m) Cabinet should ask the Director of Children’s and Young People’s Services to undertake a review of the existing procedures which are in place for consultation with Looked After Children (i.e. the Reference Group) to ensure that the young people in our care have a greater role in the planning, delivery and assessment of service provision.
- (n) Cabinet should consider how it can better incentivise Looked After Children both in relation to educational achievement, and/or in terms in non-exclusion from school. There should be greater rewards and recognition for achievements, including the provision of financial (or in-lieu) rewards for those who are successful in their studies, or are able to remain in school without exclusion. As with the provision of IT, it is suggested that there is scope for an innovative approach here and there may well be opportunities for sponsorship of awards.
- (o) Cabinet should recognise and support the role undertaken by Care in Durham, which provides a valuable service to young people in the Looked After System. Care in Durham should be encouraged to develop a Business Plan in connection with its activities to access any potential funding which may be available.
- (p) The Working Group fully endorses the expansion of the existing student mentoring provision for Looked After Children, which provides valuable social, as well as educational, support for young people in care in County Durham. It would however, also like to see consideration be given as to how care leavers can play a greater role in mentoring of young people who are currently looked after.
- (q) Members heard during the course of the project about staffing issues in the STEPS Therapeutic Service because of a review of services underway. The Working Group would draw the attention of Cabinet to the role of STEPs which was considered in a previous scrutiny report “Minding the Gap” when recommendations were made (and accepted by Cabinet) about the need to ensure that adequate resources were deployed to sustain capacity within STEPS to fully meet the needs of young people. The move towards more a more integrated service (with CAMHS) should be supported, *if it can be shown that this delivers better performance and outcomes for young people.*
- (r) Cabinet may wish to bear in mind that, whilst the Council has well developed in-house education support for Looked After Children in the form of the Access Service, there are independent sector providers in the

marketplace who may be able to provide ad-hoc consultancy or additional services which either cannot be met in-house, or be provided within relevant timescales.

- (s) Where criminal damage is caused by Looked After Children in Homes, the restorative justice project findings should be used by staff to guide their approach to dealing with such incidents and staff should be reminded of the need to apply this Guidance.
- (t) Cabinet should ask the Director of Children's and Young People's Services consider how the Audit Commission toolkit for Educational Attainment of Looked After Children can be employed in County Durham, given that its use may be beneficial in any Joint Area Review/Comprehensive Performance Assessment of the Council.
- (u) As a major employer, the Council should consider as part of its recruitment processes (i.e. apprenticeships) whether greater assistance into employment can be given to Looked After Children in (or formerly in) its care via the Teenagers into Work Scheme.
- (v) Foster carers, residential homes staff and designated teachers should be encouraged to ensure that where homework is given to Looked After Children, carers and staff are aware of this and can provide appropriate support, if necessary.

Review

- 14.6 These recommendations should be reviewed six months after consideration by the Executive.

Section Fifteen – Membership of the Working Group

The following Councillors were Members of the Working Group:

Joe Armstrong
Alan Barker
Dorothy Bowman (Chair)
Dennis Coates
Alan Cox
Jean Chaplow
Brian Ebbatson
George Gray
Edna Hunter
Ken Holroyd
John Lethbridge
Ron Meir
Raymond Pye
John Robinson
Mamie Simmons
Dennis Southwell
Gordon Tennant
Mac Williams

The following were Co-opted Members of the Working Group:

Anita Atkinson (Parent Governor Representative)
Anthea Tallentire (Parent Governor Representative)
Christina Usher (Learning and Skills Council)
John Dormer

Councillors Michelle Hodgson and Neil Foster (Cabinet Portfolio Holders) also attended and provided information at a number of sessions of the Working Group

Officer Support:

In addition to the witnesses identified in the Appendices to the report, the following officers supported the ongoing work of the Group:

Meg Boustead – Strategic Manager, Children’s and Young People’s Services, Social Care and Health
Maureen Clare – Head of Access and Inclusion, Education
Jane Le Sage – Access Service Manager, Education
Tom Bolton – Senior Scrutiny Support Officer, Corporate Services
Diane Close – Committee Officer, Corporate Services
Ros Layfield – Committee Officer, Corporate Services
Susie Joscelyne – Student Research placement, Northumbria University

APPENDIX 1

Oral Evidence Taken

Date of Meeting	Organisation/Witnesses
26 July 2005	Looked After Children in County Durham - Gail Hopper (Social Care and Health, Durham County Council)
24 August 2005	The Educational Attainment of Looked After Children - Maureen Clare (Head of Access and Inclusion, Education) Jane le Sage (Access Service Manager, Education)
14 October 2005	Role of the Access Service - Jane le Sage (Access Service Manager, Education, Durham County Council)
19 October 2005	Consultation Meeting with Looked After Care Leavers
22 November 2005	Attendance at Designated Governor Training
19 January 2006	Looked After Children Mental Health Issues - Mark Cain (Strategy and Commissioning Manager, CAMHS) Jo Dawson (General Manager, CAHMS) The role of the STEPS Therapeutic Service – Dave Watson, Service Manager, Specialist Interventions and Jan Edwards (Acting Manager, STEPS Service)
27 January 2006	Consultation with Foster Carers
10 Feb 2006	Jane le Sage (Access Service Manager, Education, Durham County Council) and colleagues from the Access Service
20 March 2006	Care in Durham - Jeff Spence and Sandy Nugent
24 March 2006	Observation of Corporate Parenting Panel
5 April 2006	The role of the Young People's Service - Dorothy Alexander and colleagues Physical Health of Looked After Children - Jane Scott (Looked After Children nurse) DVD evidence from Hampshire County Council and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea – Tom Bolton

Written Evidence Submitted

Date	Evidence (Reports of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny unless otherwise noted)
14 October 2005	Officer Response to Outstanding Scrutiny Questions - Maureen Clare (Head of Access and Inclusion, Education, Durham County)
7 December 2005	Local Authority Best Practice - Glenn Simpson (Centre for Public Policy, Northumbria University)
19 January 2006	Feedback from consultation session with young care leavers Looked After Children Designated Governor Training report
27 January 2006	Feedback from consultation with carers
10 February 2006	Report from Jane le Sage (Access Service Manager, Education, Durham County Council)
5 April 2006	Doing our Best for Looked After Children – Report of LGA Conference 30 Questions for Overview and Scrutiny about the Education of Looked After Children
8 May 2006	Susie Joscelyne (Northumbria University) - Survey of designated teachers and governors Evidence submitted by the National Teaching and Advisory Service Feedback from consultation with young people from Care in Durham Jane Le Sage - Officer Feedback about Best Practice Issues

STRATEGY FOR LOOKED AFTER SERVICE

2004 – 2006

Updated November 2005

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 - Appendix D: Performance Assessment Framework
 - Appendix E: Social Care & Health Looked After Services
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 - Residential Services
 - Fostering & Adoption Services
 - Young People’s Service

Introduction

Services for Looked after Children & Young People are on a journey of development that is both exciting and challenging. Change will accelerate with the implementation of the Children’s Act, as services move to a more focused, multi-agency approach to meeting the interests, needs and welfare of children and young people. This strategy builds on the previous 2001-3 strategy “Service for Children and Young People who need to be Looked After”. The aim of the strategy is to improve outcomes for children and young people and assist them in achieving their potential. The strategy promotes a positive commitment to equality and diversity. This document outlines the overall strategic direction of services for children and young people in County Durham between 2004 – 2006 and should be read with reference to the documents in Appendix A.

It is set in the legislative context of: Children Act 1989, Leaving Care Act 2000 and

Adoption & Children Act 2002. It was developed by the Social Care & Health Looked after Service Management Team. It sets out the direction of travel for the next 2 years and provides a framework for Social Care & Health to develop more detailed Action Plans for each section of its service.

Context

The development of this strategy for Services for Looked after Children and Young people in County Durham is set against a background of the biggest changes in the delivery of Children's and Young People's Services since the Seebohm Report. The old world order of Social Services being solely responsible for the delivery of looked after children's service has come to an end. Instead we are looking forward to a future where all services to children are delivered in a multi-agency context, where artificial and bureaucratic structural divisions do not get in the way of providing a holistic approach to ensuring positive outcomes for children and young people.

The strategy was developed with reference to the views of children and young people looked after and care leavers. Within the context of Every Child Matters, Children's and Young People's Services for looked after children and young people will increasingly be delivered in a multi-agency context. Already County Durham has some excellent examples of partnerships in practice, such as the Education of Children in Public Care Strategy and the work of the Access Team, the work of the "Looked After" nurses, the CAMHS Looked after Strategy and the multi-agency Young people's service. The Durham Multi-Agency Looked after Partnership (MALAP) will take the lead in moving towards an all agency strategy for Looked after Children and young people that will in time replace this interim, single -agency strategy.

Vision

In accordance with "Every Child Matters" the vision of the Looked After Service is to achieve the outcomes that children and young people said mattered most to them:

- Being Healthy – enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy life-style
- Staying Safe – being protected from harm and neglect and growing up able to look after themselves
- Enjoying and achieving – getting the most out of life and developing broad skills for adulthood
- Making a positive contribution – to the community and to society and not engaging in anti-social or offending behaviour
- Economic well-being – overcoming socio-economic disadvantage to achieve their full potential in life

These positive outcomes for Looked After children and young people and care leavers will be achieved through:

- A respect for the rights of children and young people
- Promotion of the individual identity of each young person, including racial, religious and cultural identity
- Staff carers who are committed to the well-being of children and young people

- and who feel well trained and supported
- Effective multi-agency assessment, planning and review
- The involvement and participation of children, young people and families
- Strategic, multi-disciplinary planning
- Services which effectively meet the needs of children and young people

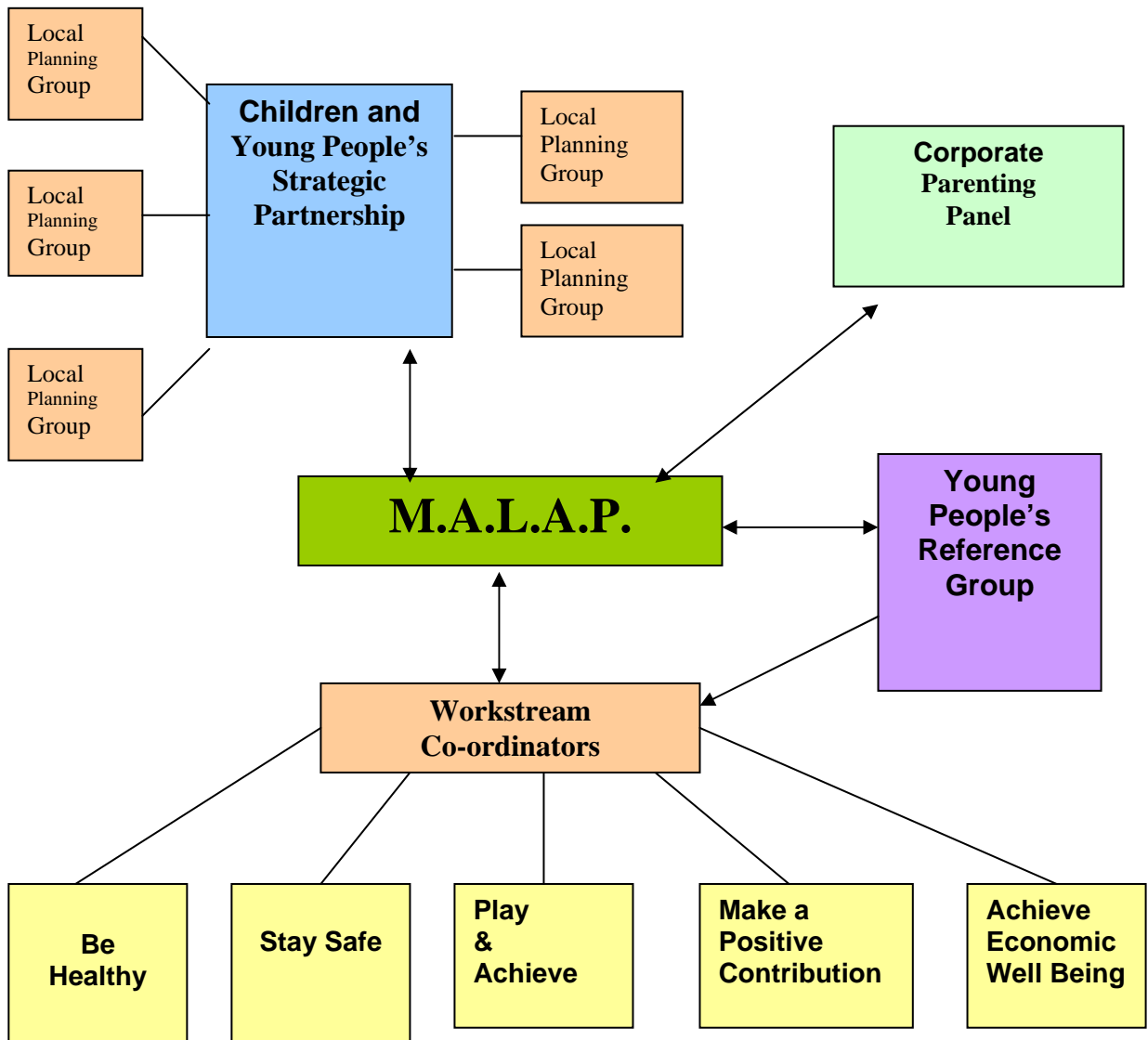
Strategic Direction

Durham’s Multi-Agency Looked After Partnership

The overall aim of the Looked after Services Strategy is to co-ordinate all the delivery of services required to meet the holistic needs of children and young people, through an effective joined up multi-agency approach.

In order to achieve this Social Care and Health has taken a lead role in the development and implementation of Durham’s Multi-Agency Looked after Partnership (MALAP)

The MALAP reports to The Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership, which provides the framework for the multi-agency co-ordination of Children’s and Young People’s Services in Durham. The MALAP also reports to the County Council’s Corporate Parenting Panel.



It is envisaged that in time the MALAP will provide a framework for the strategic direction of Looked After Services in Durham, through:

- Auditing Services
- Setting Local targets
- Strengthening Partnerships
- Contracting
- Evidence to support inspection improvement
- Participation of children and young people
- Opportunities to share good practice
- Local flexibility to meet consistent national standards
- National, regional and local strategic and operational support networks
- A holistic approach to improve the health and well being of Looked after children and care leavers
- An opportunity to celebrate multi-agency work

Until the multi-agency partnership is sufficiently developed to take the lead in this process, Social Care and Health has developed this interim single agency Looked after Strategy.

Strategic Direction for Services to looked After Children and Young People delivered by Social Care and Health

Within the framework of the Multi-Agency Looked After Partnership as described above, the overall aim of Social Care and Health's Looked after Children is to achieve a fully integrated service for all looked after children and their families. This starts with a comprehensive range of preventative and family support services to keep as many children in need as possible with their families and out of the looked after system. Innovative schemes such as Moorside respite service, Catchgate short stay unit and the Teenage Foster Placement scheme are integral components of this preventative strategy.

For some children and young people however there will be a need for them to spend some time in public care. The Looked after Children Service has a commitment to keeping this period of time as short as possible, in line with the assessed individual needs of each child or young person.

Decisions made in the first few weeks of a child or young person becoming looked after need to be influenced by the permanence policy. Permanence plans need to set realistic timescales that are meaningful in the context of the child's age and level of understanding. Delivering this aspect of the Looked after Children's Strategy is dependant upon the Children in Need service, on productive working relationships across Children in Need, Disabled Children and LAC Services, and on effective partnerships with a range of other agencies both within and outside the County Council.

Wherever possible care plans for children and young people will lead them to leaving the Looked after system via accepted routes to Permanence such as Adoption, residence Orders and Special Guardianship. When these are achieved the service must ensure that there is sufficient support in place to see these children through their childhood

years, so that they do not have to become looked after again. Multi-agency post placement support therefore must be a key component of the Looked after Strategy.

There will always be some young people however, for whom traditional permanence outside the Looked after System will not be achieved. For these young people the service has a particularly responsibility, to ensure that they have the opportunity to achieve at least one consistent and secure emotional relationship, with the support, praise and encouragement they need to realise their potential.

The service recognises that most of these young people who grow up in the looked after system will achieve the best outcomes in foster care. To this end the service is committed to expanding foster care provision in line with the Invest to Save principles. Linking Payment for Skills with NVQ to provide career pathways for foster carers will strengthen the foster carer resource base and lead to increased placement choice for these young people. It will also create the capacity for some of the most troubled youngsters, and those with highly complex disabilities to continue to live within a family setting.

Planned longer term residential services continue to play a vital role in providing placements for those relatively small numbers of young people who find it too difficult to live in a family setting. Many of these young people will have complex and sometimes conflicting needs. Provision for these young people needs to be particularly flexible and creative. In order to meet their needs the LAC Service is exploring the idea of a "virtual" team, bridging traditional fostering and residential services and incorporating Durham's 'Treatment' Foster Care Pilot. Over the next 3 years residential services for children and young people will become more focused and specialist, while maintaining the existing high quality level of provision. The continuation of the Invest to Save strategy will maintain the focus on the needs of most young people being met within County Durham resources.

For those young people who require an external placement, robust multi-agency commissioning arrangements need to be in place, in line with Best Value principles, supported by the work Accreditation Panel to ensure the quality of care is at least as high as in Durham's own establishments.

Planning and Preparation for moving on from the Looked After system is as important as permanence planning in the delivery of an integrated Looked after system. All young people age 16 and over need to be involved in agreeing their pathway plan. The Multi-agency Young People's service will identify Young People's Advisors for all looked after young people aged 15 and a half. They will work alongside the allocated social worker, helping to formulate the pathway plan and looking at realistic objectives and timescales for each young person. The Young People's Service will help to ensure young people remain looked after until the time is right for them to leave care and they are ready and prepared to leave. The corporate Parenting responsibility for care leavers continues as young people move into adulthood.

Partnerships with children, young people and their families ensure the success of innovative schemes such as Moorside Respite Service, the Teenage Fostering Scheme and Catchgate. Partnerships within services for Children and their families, especially Children in Need Teams, Disabled Childrens Team, STEPS, Cats, Community Support team and Emergency Duty Team ensure "joined up" service to children and young

people who are looked after or at risk of becoming looked after. Partnerships with Elected Members, through Corporate Parenting Panel, and councillors' active participation in the Regulation 33 inspection process, ensure a significant corporate commitment to the welfare of looked after children.

Other partnerships with (that are essential in order to achieve the best outcomes for looked after children and young people) other parts of the County Council, including the Local Education Authority, the Youth Engagement Service and Welfare Rights Service Trust, CAMHS, Connexions, Substance Misuse Services and Sexual Health Service.

Aims of Social Care and Health Looked After Service

- To provide high quality services in line with the care plan, based on the assessed needs of children and young people, within a Best Value framework.
- To ensure that the needs of children, young people and families are at the centre of Service delivery and development.
- To ensure that these services are provided by staff and carers who have the knowledge, skills, expertise and required to provide a service delivered to national standards, delivered via the Looked After Strategy and Training/Human Resources Strategy.
- To ensure that no child or young person is discriminated against on grounds of ethnic origin, gender, religion, disability or sexual orientation.
- To ensure effective partnerships across Children's and Young People's Services and with other agencies, via the MALAP and the wider Every Child Matters agenda.

Appendix A

It is set in the legislative context of: Children Act 1989, Learning Care Act 2000 and Adoption and Children Act 2002.

- The Multi-Agency Looked After Partnership Action Plan
- The Commissioning Strategy for Services to Children and Families 2004-2006
- Durham County Council's Permanence Policy and Permanence Action Plan
- The Invest to Save Strategy 2005 – 2006
- Equalities and Diversity Action Plan
- Human Resources Strategy
- Fostering and Adoption Strategy
- Residential Services Strategy
- The Young People's Service Strategy

Appendix B

Appendix C

The partners in MALAP who currently deliver services to Looked After Children and Young People are:

- Young People
- Social Care & Health – Looked After Services, Children In Need, STEPS and

- Independent Reviewing Officers
- Education
 - CAMHS
 - PCT Children's Leads
 - Designated Looked After Nurse
 - Leisure Services
 - Youth Engagement Service
 - Connexions
 - Looked After Clinical Psychologist
 - Children's Rights Officer
 - XS (Substance Misuse Service)
 - Teenage Pregnancy
 - Health Promotion

In early 2004 an audit of services for looked after children was conducted using the Healthy Care Audit Tool. The Audit Tool provided a framework for the MALAP to assess its position with regard to service provision in relation to 11 outcomes across 6 Healthy Care Needs areas for children looked after and care leavers.

The Health Care Audit covered:-

- Policy
- Partnership Working
- Participation of children and young people
- Practice

The six needs areas are as follows

- Feel safe, protected and valued in a strong, sustained and committed relationship with at least one carer
- Live in a health caring environment
- Feel respected and supported in his/her personal identity and cultural beliefs
- Have access to excellent effective health care treatment and services
- Have opportunities to develop personal and social skills, talents and abilities and spend time in freely chosen play, culture and leisure activities
- Prepare for leaving care by being supported to live, care and provide for him/herself

These needs broadly correspond to the 7 dimensions of the child's developmental needs as outlined in the assessment framework for children in need. Looking after Children materials and Integrated Children's System.

As a result of the Audit an Action Plan was produced this will address areas for development and improvement, in order of priority. These will form the basis of a Multi-Agency Strategic Planning Framework that will monitor and review progress against those areas. These priorities will inform service objectives for all constituent agencies.

Appendix E

1. The Looked After Service is developing a Balanced Scorecard to assist in monitoring performance across the outcome areas.
2. Increasing percentage of children looked after for at least four years, who have been in current placement for at least two years – (PAF D35).
3. Reducing the percentage of Children Looked After who have had 3 or more placements in a year (PAF A1)
4. Increasing the percentage of young people who were looked after aged 16, who are engaged in employment, education and training when 19.
5. Increasing the percentage of young people looked after aged 16, who are living in suitable accommodation when 19.
6. Percentage of LAC with permanence plan at 3 month review.
7. Increasing the percentage of children looked after who are adopted.
8. Increasing the percentage of children adopted within 1 year of their “Best Interest” decision.
9. Increasing percentage of children looked after who are in foster placements or placed for adoption.
10. Reducing offending of children looked after – (PAF C18)
11. Increasing the percentage of Looked After Children and Young People achieving 5 or more A8 – C -

Appendix C – Social Care and Health’s Services for Looked After Children and Young People

Looked After Social Work Service

Priorities for 2004 – 5:

- Specifically reduce numbers of children in long term placements that break down by identifying problems and providing support
- Ensure 100% of Looked After Reviews are held within required timescales and that key data is entered within 2 days of the Looked after Review being held.
- Ensure children and young people move through the Looked after system effectively and appropriately.

- Develop effective working partnerships with those with parental responsibility, carers and significant other in the life of the child or young person.
- Improve educational opportunities for Looked After Children and Young People.
- Ensure Health Plans are in place and implemented.
- Ensure that the child or young person's view is listened to, understood and taken into account within the decision-making process, recognising that each child/young person is an individual with unique needs.
- Implement Aiming for Excellence for all staff

Residential Services

The main priorities for Residential Services 2004 are:

- Implementation of the Residential Strategy 2004/6.
- All homes to have attained Investing in Children by September 2005
- Complete full implementation of Aiming for Excellence
- Meet training development targets for numbers of staff completing NVQ
- Increase quality of data input onto SSID
- Temporary staffing structures to be made permanent
- Implementation of Restoratives Justice

Fostering and Adoption Services

There are 206 foster carers registered to Durham Social Care and Health currently offering 353 placements. A range of placements are offered: emergency, intermediate, long term and adoptive.

The recruitment strategy is focused on increasing placement choice. Recruitment campaigns have used a wide range of marketing strategies, including bus and radio advertising. An effective enquiry response system has been developed, with a dedicated telephone line and a website. A high quality information pack is sent out as a same day response to every enquiry. This contains the full range of information about adoption and the types of fostering available.

Response times for each stage of the process are managed and monitored.

Retention of carers is a key feature of the strategy and depends on effective communication, partnership and support from a wide range of professionals and other agencies. There are 7 foster carer support groups across the county, in addition to adoption support groups. The groups run regularly at various times and venues to promote good attendance.

The Payment for skills scheme seeks to reward carers for their experience and level of skill. The scheme has been critical in maintaining current levels of carers in the face of competition, particularly from the independent sector. Payment for skills is currently under review and the future structure will link payment with the NVQ level 3 Child Care

Award in particular and a career pathway for foster carers in general.

The profile of carers has changed in recent years and there are now a significant number of single female carers. Recruitment of foster carers from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds continues to be a challenge in Durham, although the recruitment strategy sets out to attract carers from all parts of the community. There are a growing number of relative and friend carers. Collation of management information informs the recruitment strategy, projecting the number, type and skills of the required fostering resource.

Continued improvement to the recruitment and retention of foster carers is set as a key objective of the Invest to Save Strategy. Allowing for natural wastage, the projected increase in carer numbers this year is 7.5%

Young People's Service

The Young People's Service Strategy has been developed as a result of multi-agency development days and consultation with care experienced young people.

It is based on these principles:-

- Maximise the number of young people engaged in employment, education and training at the age of 19.
- Supporting young people in 'suitable accommodation'.
- Staying in touch with young people until they are 21, or longer if they remain in a programme of education or training.

Aims of Service

- To agree a coherent multi-agency plan for Young People's Services in County Durham
- Ensure that young people are fully involved in the planning and review of services intended to meet their needs.
- Promote support for care leavers and enhance their life chances
- Ensure consistent reliable and flexible services based on best practice are available to young people.
- Develop partnership working to ensure all services are more accessible to young people and responsive to their needs.
- Ensure access to an appropriate range of safe and secure accommodation and support care leavers
- Increase the range of services provided to young people in a co-ordinated way.
- Develop education, employment and training opportunities for care leavers, including opportunities with employers such as the County Council.

Policy for the Education of Looked After Children

‘Children in public care are our children. We hold their future in our hands and education is the key to that future’

Statement of Intent

Looked after children have the right to the same outcomes we want for every child- that they should be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution to society and achieve economic well being.

In Durham, our statement of intent as a corporate parent is to ensure that all looked after children have access to appropriate high quality educational opportunities that help them to achieve the highest educational standards he or she possibly can. This includes supporting their aspirations to achieve in further and higher education.

Making a difference where you live



CONTEXT

The core principle of the Children Act 1989 is that children should be kept with their families wherever possible. The local authority aims to improve support to children and families to ensure children can be kept safe and have their needs met at home.

However in some circumstances children enter the care system and become 'looked after children'. These children may be:

- Subject to care orders where the local authority shares parental responsibility.
- Accommodated
- Unaccompanied minors who are seeking asylum.

Children enter the care system for a variety of reasons all of which cause distress and upset to the children and their families. Most children (80%) enter care because of abuse or neglect or for family reasons such as bereavement, with less than 10% entering care because of their own behaviour.

Research studies and reports reveal an alarming nationwide underachievement of looked after children. The recent report 'A Better Education for Children in Public Care' (SEU 2003) highlighted:

- Looked after children perform less well in comparison to all children in their SATS assessments across all key stages.
- Only 8 % of Year 11 looked after children who had spent at least one year in care gained 5 or more A*-C GCSEs compared with 50% of all young people
- Almost 50% gained no qualifications at GCSE level or equivalent
- 42% of Year 11 looked after children who had been in care for at least one year did not sit any GCSEs or GNVQs in comparison to 4% of all children
- Only 1% of looked after children progress to university

In County Durham the level of achievement of looked after children reflects the national picture. In 2003/4:

- 46.5% of looked after children gained 1 or more GCSE A*-G compared to 85.7% of the total year 11 cohort within the County of Durham
- 9.3% of looked after children gained 5 GCSE A*-C compared to 44.6% of the County Durham total Year 11 cohort

Good experiences of education and high educational attainment amongst looked after children is important because it significantly impacts on the life chances of every individual child in terms of quality, choice and enjoyment.

Current levels of performance are not always a true reflection of the ability of the child but are influenced by a number of complex factors. The Social Exclusion Report 2003 identified 5 key reasons why looked after children underachieve in education:

- They spend too much time out of school
- Their lives are characterised by instability
- They do not have sufficient help with their education if they get behind
- Primary carers are not expected or equipped to provide sufficient support and encouragement for learning and development
- They have unmet emotional, mental and physical health needs that impact on their education

However, looked after children are less likely to fall behind at school if every professional associated with the care and education of these children attach the same expectations and aspirations to their education as any **'good parent'** would.

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

In recognition of the underachievement of looked after children the Government, over several years, has introduced measures to improve support for children in care. The main legislative influences are summarised below:

- From 1998 a five year strategy 'Quality Protects' was introduced to improve services to children including measures to ensure looked after children gained maximum life chances from educational opportunities, health and social care
- The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 placed a duty on local education authorities to promote high standards and produce Education Development Plans which set out key targets including the national priorities for looked after children.
- The DfES and DoH issued the Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care jointly in May 2000.
- The Care Standards Act 2000 established National Minimum Standards for providers including children's homes and fostering services to prioritise education
- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 requires each young person aged 16-17 who is in or leaving care to have a personal adviser and a Pathway Plan which sets out their goals on leaving school including the provision of education. Assistance relating to education, training and employment should continue until they are 21 or if they are completing education or training until the age of 24.

- The Social Exclusion Report 2003 ‘ A better education for children in care’ sets out specific recommendations for both Central Government and local action to ensure looked after children can access the full range of educational opportunities they deserve.
- The Children Act 2004 provides the new legislative spine for developing effective and accessible services focused on the needs of children, young people and their families – **places a duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of looked after children**
- Section 52 of the Children's Act 2004 states that in carrying out their duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children looked after they must give particular attention to the educational implications of any decision about the welfare of these children. The Government expects schools to take a positive proactive approach to co-operating with and supporting local authorities in discharging this duty. The duty applies to all children looked after by an authority including those it has placed out of County.
- Revised DfES statutory guidance issued in July 2004 **places a statutory duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of looked after children.** This guidance applies to England only and must be followed by local authorities unless there are exceptional circumstances that justify departures from it.

A summary of the statutory guidance having a direct bearing on the education of looked after children is listed in [Appendix 1](#)

Local Framework

This policy supports the above legislative and policy framework and is supported by a number of local plans, initiatives and policies to reinforce the value of education and the priority to raise attainment of looked after children including:

- The Strategic Plan for the Education of Looked After Children detailing the necessary actions to enhance the achievements of looked after children
- The Single Education Plan (formerly the Education Plan EDP) which aims to raise school standards and pupil attainment
- The Behaviour Support Plan which provides an overall framework for support to schools in promoting good pupil's behaviour and in dealing with emotional and behavioural difficulties
- The Early Years Development and Childcare Plan which enables the provision of early years education for children
- The Connexions Strategy and DCC Leaving Care Strategy which aims to create a step change in participation and attainment through the teenage years and to

ensure that an increasing number of young people make a successful transition from adolescence into adulthood and working life.

- The Children's and Young People's Services Plan which seeks to ensure that young people have the skills and support necessary to manage their own lives successfully
- The Investing in Children Initiative which aims to establish ongoing dialogue with children and young people and encourage their participation in decision making processes
- The Access Service Operational Plan which ensures appropriate academic and personal support is available to looked after children, carers, and professional colleagues.

Under Section 17 the Children Act 2004 a single Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) will be in place by 1 April 2006, which will replace a number of the above statutory plans. The CYPP will address the specific issue to make improvements in the achievements of looked after children and will:

- Include outcome measures which contribute to the national target to improve the educational achievement of looked after children (regardless of where they are placed) and narrow the gaps between their achievements and those of other children
- Ensure that need assessments are carried out in full consultation with key local partners and are fine grained enough to look at outcomes for looked after children
- Detail what actions will be taken by the local authority or children's trust and key partners to provide tailored packages of services to support the educational achievement of looked after children and how the deployment of resources will support these actions

NATIONAL PERFORMANCE MEASURES

DfES statutory guidance issued in 2005 highlights the measures of a local authority's success in promoting the educational achievements of looked after children are:

- *For looked after children to achieve educational outcomes as good as their peers*
- *To demonstrate throughout the local authority an active commitment to ensuring the highest educational outcomes for looked after children*
- *To have in place and to follow clear and robust procedures and protocols which encourage them to have high expectations of themselves and to achieve their full potential*

In December 2004 the Government set revised Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets and performance indicators to narrow the gap in educational achievement between looked after children and their peers and improve their educational support and the stability of their lives

- *To improve absolute performance and narrow the gap between the performance of looked after children and that of their peers on the following measures:*
- *Percentage of children aged 11, looked after for at least 12 months, who obtain level 4 in KS2 English and Maths*
- *Percentage of young people looked after for at least 12 months who reach school leaving age without having sat a GCSE equivalent exam*
- *Percentage of young people looked after for at least 12 months and in Year 11 who achieve 5 or more GCSEs graded A*-C or equivalent*
- *Participation of care leavers aged 19 in education, employment or training*

Durham County Council targets for the educational achievement of looked after children reflect the above national targets and set challenging local targets that support improvement in the educational achievement of looked after child

THE COUNTY COUNCIL AS THE CORPORATE PARENT

Durham County Council believes that the following principles are paramount and central in carrying out its responsibilities as a good corporate parent:

- Education should be valued and seen as a passport to better life chances
- All those involved as corporate parents should promote and reward achievement and have high expectations for the educational achievement of looked after children
- All looked after children have an entitlement to appropriate full time education and access to national accreditation programmes
- All looked after children have the right to continuity and stability of education
- All looked after children will have their views taken into account in any decisions affecting their education.
- Prompt and positive action should be taken to address educational difficulties for looked after children
- Every action should trigger the ultimate question ' would this be good enough for my child'

The Local Authority will ensure:

- A lead Elected Member will champion the needs of looked after children across the Authority
- Appropriate and specific arrangements are in place for sharing data between school, education and social services and other agencies to ensure they can fulfil their responsibilities to meet the educational needs of looked after children
- Children's homes and fostering services including those in the independent sector have clear written education policies which meet National Minimum Standards
- Appropriate full time education provision is arranged in parallel to care placements for children unless the placement is made in an emergency for the child's immediate protection
- Disruptions is minimised to a child's education when the care placement changes
- Education placements are secured within 20 school days where a placement has been made in an emergency or has broken down
- The attendance of looked after children is effectively monitored and appropriate intervention is put in place to ensure attendance is maximised and does not exceed 25 days in an academic year
- Looked after children are placed only in a home which demonstrates high commitment to supporting the education of resident children
- Educational placements are suitable in meeting the needs of the child, have high expectations and provide an appropriate curriculum to meet the potential of the child
- Looked after children are given top priority with regards to admissions criteria within schools where the LEA is the admission authority
- The educational needs of a child are identified as part of the Initial and Core Assessment
- Each child has a current high quality Personal Education Plan (or Pathway Plan if applicable) within the statutory timescale which is reviewed three times per year
- Personal Education plans are developed with the involvement of the child, social worker, parents/carers, schools and other agencies as appropriate
- Looked after children are involved in decisions regarding their education and their views are taken into account
- Looked after children benefit from a range of appropriate educational support and opportunities that enable them to fulfil their potential including Out of School Hours Learning Opportunities (OOSHL)
- Looked after children receive transitional support at key stages of their school career and in preparation for leaving care
- Relevant local authority representative's attend parents evenings and mediate on behalf of a looked after child when s/he faces problems at school

- Maximum encouragement is given to foster carers to take advantage of a pre school place where appropriate
- The achievements of looked after children are celebrated
- Prompt and supported reintegration into school when education or home placements have broken down
- Schools, carers and other professionals receive active support and training in meeting the needs of looked after children
- All schools have a named designated teacher and governor for looked after children who are fully aware of their role and responsibilities
- Out of authority placements are reduced where they are not in the best interests of the child
- Looked after children in secure accommodation have access to education and training consistent with their statutory entitlements.

MONITORING PERFORMANCE

The Children Act 2004 requires joint inspection of all Children's and Young People's Services. The Joint Area Reviews (JAR) led by Ofsted will report on how far services are working together to secure positive outcomes for children. Particular attention will be given to looked after children.

JARs draw on annual performance assessments (APA) of council Children's and Young People's Services and as part of this process key judgements will be made as to how looked after children are supported in achieving educationally. Examples of evidence will be:

- The educational progress, school attendance and behaviour of looked after children are carefully planned monitored and reported
- Targets are set and improvement in performance achieved
- Steps are taken to maximise the achievement and attendance and avoid the exclusion of looked after children

Ofsted's framework for School inspection will also specifically consider how far the education provided in schools meets the need of the range of pupils at those schools and specific attention is to vulnerable children including those looked after

Arrangements are in place to monitor and evaluate the Policy for looked after children at both strategic and operational levels

The implementation of the policy for the education of looked after children is through the actions detailed in the **Strategic Plan for Looked After Children** which will also describe systems for monitoring progress by identified individuals or agencies. This Plan will have direct correlation with the Children and Young People's Plan as from

The Looked After Children Strategic Group meets termly to monitor the Plan and progress is reported on a regular basis to the Children and Young Person's Strategic Partnership via the Multi Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP) and to elected members via annual reports to Cabinet and regular updates to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Appendix One

This policy should be read in conjunction with statutory guidance and publications on the reform of Children's and Young People's Services arising from the Children's Act 2004 including:

- **Durham County Council Strategic Plan for the Education of Looked After Children** detailing the actions required to effectively promote and support the achievements of looked after children
- **Every Child Matters: Change for Children** a core document, which sets out national long-term programmes of change
- **National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services (NSF)**
- **The Outcomes Framework** which supports the 5 outcomes with underpinning aims. This links to national targets and other key indicators and makes clear that inspectorates will judge the extent to which services improve all five outcomes as they affect looked after children
- **The Children's Workforce Strategy** which will set out action to be taken nationally and locally to ensure there are the skills, ways of working and capacity in the children's workforce to deliver change for children.
- **The Common Assessment Framework** and national guidance to apply to information sharing arrangements within and between agencies

Associated Guidance

- Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care and the parallel guidance on the health of looked after children
- SEU Report 2003 'A Better Education for Children in Care' which sets out specific recommendations for local action to provide looked after children with the full range of educational opportunities they deserve
- Special Educational Needs Code of Practice
- National Minimum Standards for children's homes and fostering services which include standards relating to promoting educational achievement of looked after children
- Access to Education for Children and Young People with Medical Needs
- Who Does What? How Social Workers and Carers Can Support the Education of Children in Care

Procedures for Supporting Looked After Children resident in Children's Homes

Manual:	Young People Looked After in Children's Homes
Title:	Education
Category:	Procedure
Procedure Number:	CLA/063
Version Number:	4.0
Department:	Social Care and Health
Date Published:	16/03/2004
Last Reviewed:	11/02/2004
Next Review Due:	11/02/2005

INTRODUCTION

In the past many children and young people looked after by Social Care and Health have not had positive educational outcomes. Statistics and research indicate that many of our LAC achieve well below their potential in education. This in turn may have a detrimental effect of their future life chances. Education must be at the forefront of planning for children and young people in care. All care staff must develop positive actions to promote young people's education and enhance their future life chances.

ABBREVIATIONS

LAC	Looked After Children
LEA	Local Education Authority
PSP	Pastoral Support Programme
SEN	Special Education Needs
IEP	Individual Education Plan
PEP	Personal Education Plan
EWS	Education Welfare Service

D of EE Dept of Education and Environment

DFES Dept for Education and Skills

CONTEXT

Every Child Matters sets out measures for reforming the delivery of services for children, young people and families. It builds on existing measures to ensure that children at risk from harm and neglect are protected and they are supported to develop their full potential.

LAC have the right to expect the outcomes as for every child – be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution to society and achieve economic well-being.

The educational achievement of LAC, as a group remains unacceptably low. The Children's Act 2004 places a duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of LAC. The local authority as "corporate parent" must demonstrate a strong commitment to help every LAC to achieve the highest educational standards he or she possibly can.

The Social Exclusion Unit Report 2003 identified 5 key reasons why LAC underachieve in education:

- Too much time spent out of school
- Instability
- Insufficient help with education
- Primary carers not equipped or expected to provide support and encouragement for learning and development
- Unmet emotional, mental and physical health needs that impact on education

The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 places duty on education authorities to promote high standards and produce Educational Development Plans which set out key targets including national priorities for LAC.

The Care Standards Act 2000 establishes National Minimum Standards for providers including children's homes and fostering services to prioritise and promote education.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 requires each young person aged 16 – 17 who is in or leaving care to have a personal advisor and a Pathway Plan which sets out their goals on leaving school including the provision of education, training or employment.

The Social Exclusion Unit Report 2003 "A Better Education for Children in Care" sets out specific recommendations for both central government and local action to ensure LAC can access the full range of educational opportunities they deserve.

The Assessing Outcomes documentation provides the tools (care planning, reviews, Assessment and Action Records) to work with children who are looked after. It helps set out appropriate aspirations and directs the actions required for the educational

development of each individual child. Fulfilling the obligations of the assessing outcomes documentation is an essential first step in the planning for the education of children and young people who are in the looked after system.

The Connexions Strategy and Durham County Council Leaving Care Strategy aim to create a change in participation and attainment through the teenage years to ensure an increasing number of young people make a successful transition from adolescence into adulthood and working life.

Special Educational Needs Code of Practice sets out the process for the assessment of need. This identifies the specialist support that can be expected for the child from their school and education authority.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Durham County Council believes the following are central in carrying out its responsibilities as a good corporate parent:

The local authority

- Education should be valued and seen as a passport to better life chances.
- All staff involved as corporate parents should promote and reward achievement and have high expectations for the educational achievement of LAC.
- All LAC have an entitlement to appropriate full time education and access to national accreditation programmes.
- All LAC have the right to continuity and stability of education.
- All LAC will have their views taken into account in any decisions affecting their education.
- Prompt and positive action should be taken to address educational difficulties for LAC.

The home

- There is a clear written policy on supporting education, which meets National Minimum Standards – i.e. regular school attendance, high quality homework, reading support, monitoring of progression in relation to PEP targets, effective liaison between home and school.
- The home will demonstrate high commitment to supporting the education of the resident children to achieve and enjoy in education and out of school learning.
- The children's home will provide an environment, which promotes the value of education and encourage young people to aspire to and take advantage of further and higher education and training.
- The home will provide an appropriate setting for homework and provide the child with help and over see their work.
- The home will provide facilities for study and learning including access to computers for the completion of schoolwork, books and reference and resource materials from sources such as Cultural Services.
- Staff must support LAC to attend school and succeed in education.
- Staff must be fully involved in educational planning.

- Staff are consulted on their needs in respect to supporting education of the children they care for.
- Staff have a clear understanding of the child's aspirations.
- Staff recognise and celebrate achievements of the children within the home.
- Each home must have a nominated Education Co-ordinator to take responsibility for promoting the value of education within the home.
- The Education Co-ordinator is responsible for ensuring that appropriate links are established to enable the Key Worker to access a full range of resources and support on behalf of the young person.

The Key Worker

- The Key Worker will ensure the young person has a current high quality PEP (or Pathway Plan, if applicable) within the statutory timescale, which is reviewed three times a year.
- The Key Worker shall work in partnership with parents, schools/education providers and other significant adults to support a young person through daily school life.
- It is the Key Worker's responsibility to ensure all records relating to a young person's education are detailed on their personal file and relayed to the LAC Designated Teacher at school.
- The Key Worker must ensure that the placement plan, including agreements about educational provision is completed in accordance with National Minimum Standards.
- The Key Worker should be alert to signs that a young person is being discriminated against or bullied and will work in partnership with the school to ensure that such details are promptly and effectively dealt with. This should be in accordance with the County Council's Anti-Bullying Policy.

ACTION

All Staff

- Staff within the home should ensure that appropriate support is available for young people for whom English is an additional language.
- Staff should enable children in the home to enjoy and have fun whilst learning, take pride in their achievements, receive encouragement and celebrate successes.
- Staff will show a daily interest in the young person's in and out of school hours activities and homework, by offering advice, support and guidance.
- Young people will be encouraged to develop a positive outlook on school and school life. This will be supported by enthusiastic encouragement and practical assistance to participate in a wide range of activities offered in and out of the school setting.

Education Co-ordinator

- The Education Co-ordinator will establish links with The Access Service.
- The Education Co-ordinator will establish links with the LAC Designated Teacher and EWS.

- The Education Co-ordinator will establish links with SEN Placement Officer at County Hall.
- The Education Co-ordinator will establish links with Pupil Casework Officer with regards to admissions and exclusions.
- The Education Co-ordinator will provide advice and support to Key Workers in fulfilling their expectations with regard to individual children.
- The Education Co-ordinator will negotiate with the homes manager and other bodies to ensure consumables, supplies and facilities are readily available for young people.

Key Worker

- The Key Worker will ensure that a young person is enrolled at the most suitable educational establishment and is encouraged and enabled to attend regularly. The aim is that the young person will be attending within 20 school days of placement within the home.
- The Key Worker will establish links with key personnel within the school and obtain all necessary documentation e.g. school prospectus, calendar of key events, timetables, home school agreements, anti-bullying policy etc.
- The Key Worker will get to know the young person, their strengths, interests and abilities and levels of attainment. They will be involved in setting PEP SMART targets.
- The Key Worker will contribute to the PEP, by attending the initial meeting and subsequent reviews with the LAC Designated Teacher, parent (if appropriate), child's Social Worker, Access Education Key Worker and child.
- The Key Worker should attend meetings, parent's evenings, school events and activities to ensure the child can take advantage of advice, support and opportunities to promote education.
- The Key Worker will work closely with the Social Worker to ensure the Plans, Reviews and Assessment and Action Records fully address education. They must ensure all documentation is completed and SMART targets are set.
- The Key Worker should identify any barriers to learning and liaise with all parties to ensure actions are established to overcome these barriers.
- Where a child is experiencing difficulties the Key Worker along with Social Worker, school, Access Education Key Worker and other professionals from education (where appropriate) should communicate to provide a consistent and unified approach to help a young person to overcome the difficulty. The discussions, development strategies and action plans will be recorded and kept on file.
- Where a child has a statement of SEN the Key Worker should work with school and the LEA to access and utilize the specialist services available. The Key Worker should pursue these extra services with vigour and determination initiating contact within 5 school days.
- The Key Worker will inform school of any absence from school. All efforts must be made to keep these to a minimum.
- The Key Worker will immediately notify school, parents, EWS, Social Worker and Access Education Key Worker of any unauthorised absence from school. If this develops into a pattern of behaviour the Key Worker must raise the issues with the relevant parties. A multi-agency, co-operative strategy will be developed to help address the reasons for regular attendance with the young person and

- reduce the number of absences.
- The Key Worker must ensure that records contain specific information about their educational history, progress, achievements, copies of relevant documents e.g. PEP's, PEP reviews, statement of SEN, certificates etc.
- All of the above must be done in a child centred manner in order to ensure the child views this extra attention in a positive and supportive way.

Every action should trigger the ultimate question:

“Would this be good enough for my child?”

RELATED DOCUMENTS

DCC Anti-Bullying Policy
County Council Policy for Education of Looked After Children
Section 52 – Children Act 2004
Every Child Matters
Social Exclusion Unit Report
Access Service Education Guide

Personal Education Plans (PEPs) for Years 10/11

My Personal Education Plan

Name:

Age:

Year Group: 11

School:

Date:



Making a difference where you live

How are things going at school?

e.g. friends, teachers, homework, coursework

What do you most enjoy about school?

What subjects do you like best at school?

How do you get on with homework / coursework?

Why?

Are there any subjects you are not particularly enjoying at school and why?

Is there anything you would like to improve on in school?

What are your predicted grades and are there any you would like to try to improve?

Do you attend any after school activities and how often?

How do you spend your spare time?

What have you achieved over the last year?

Have you thought about what you want to do with your life when you leave school?

Jobs, ambitions, lifestyle

What qualifications/ training would you need to do these jobs?

Would you be interested in finding out more detail about these jobs?

Have you met your Connexions Advisor?
What is his/her name?

Do you think there are other things that we need to do to help you prepare
for leaving school in the summer?

Targets

Three things that I would like to be able to do next year that I cannot do now:

1.
2.
3.

I will do the following to help me achieve my targets:

.....

Who else would you like to help you?

Signed:

Date:

Comments from School:

.....
.....

Signed:

Date:

Comments from Social Worker:

.....
.....

Signed:

Date:

Comments from Parent/Carer:

.....
.....
.....

Signed:

Date:

Date of PEP Review:

My Personal Education Plan

Name:

Age:

Year Group: 10

School:

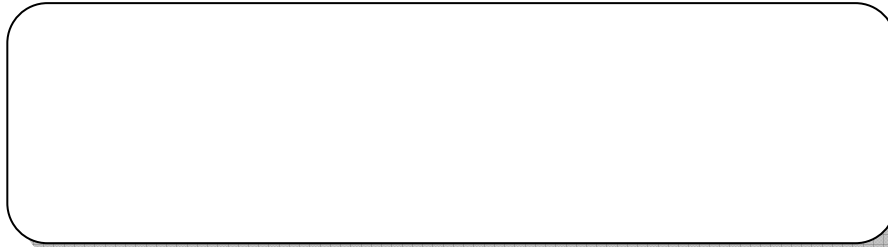
Date:



Making a difference where you live

How are things going at school?

e.g. friends, teachers, homework, coursework

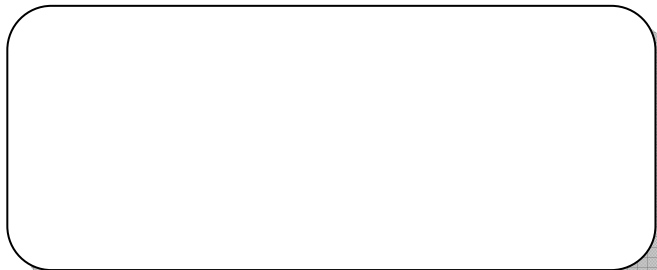


What do you most enjoy about school?

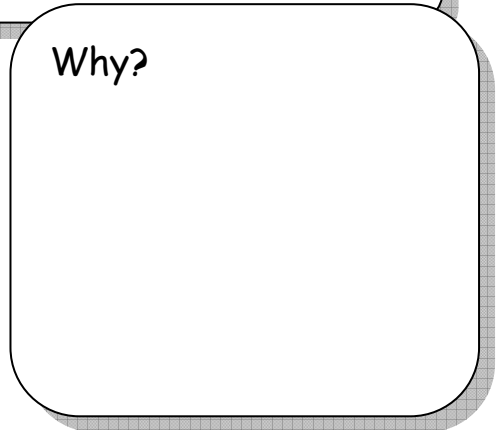
What subjects do you like best at school?



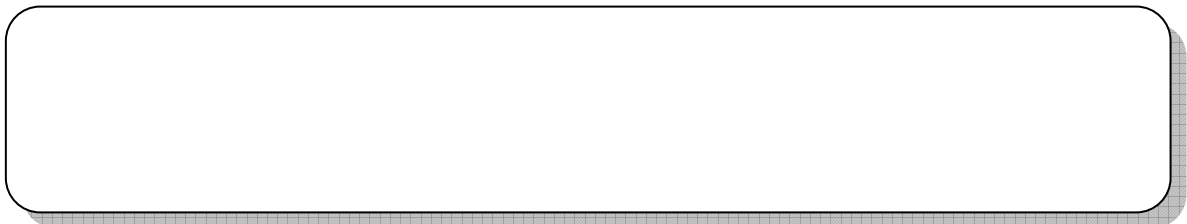
How do you get on with homework / coursework?



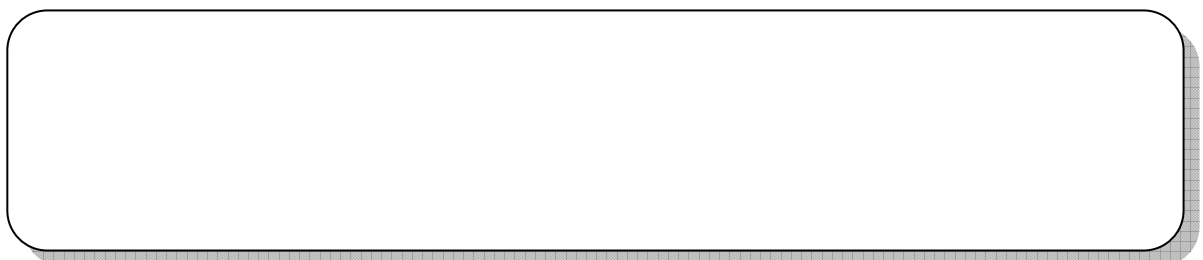
Why?



Are there any subjects you are not particularly enjoying at school and why?



Does anything worry you about school?



Is there anything you would like to improve on in school?

Do you attend any after school clubs/activities ?

How do you spend your spare time?

If you got the chance what else would you like to try?

What have you achieved over the last year?

Have you thought about what you want to do with your life when you leave school?

Jobs, ambitions, lifestyle

What qualifications/ training would you need to do these jobs?

Would you be interested in finding out more detail about these jobs?

Targets

Three things that I would like to be able to do next year that I cannot do now:

1.

2,

3.

I will do the following to help me achieve my targets:

.....

Who else would you like to help you?

Signed:

Date:

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.....
.....

Signed:

Date:

Comments from Social Worker:

.....
.....

Signed:

Date:

Comments from Parent/Carer:

.....
.....

Signed:

Date:

Date of PEP Review: