

Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2011

Report of the Executive Director Children's Services

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: Learning City

CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT: Delivering Customer Focused Services

1 Purpose

- 1.1 This report informs members of Scrutiny of the current position of the Council as 'Corporate Parent', ensures that all members are aware of their role as "corporate parents", and provides an update on the current performance of the Council in meeting this responsibility. It also updates Scrutiny members on actions being taken to improve the outcomes for those children and young people to whom the Council has a parenting responsibility.

2 Background

- 2.1 The concept of Corporate Parenting was introduced in 1998 by the Secretary of State for Health, Frank Dobson, who outlined the duties of members as follows:

"For children who are looked after, your council has a legal and moral duty to try to provide the kind of loyal support that any good parents would give to their children...you should do your utmost to make sure that those children in public care get a good start in life..."

- 2.2 In 2007, in response to continuing concern about the persistent gap in outcomes between children in care and their peers, the then Government published the paper, *Care Matters: Time for Change*, requiring each local authority to re-examine and re-invigorate the way it meets the needs of children in care. The key elements of the paper were implemented through the Children and Young Persons' Act 2008
- 2.3 For most children, parents hold together the main strands of their lives, and maintain the knowledge of the child's history, circumstances and development. Access to professional services (for example GP and other health services, and education) and leisure, recreation and cultural activity is managed by the parent. Good parents keep abreast of their child's progress and tailor their support and advocacy according to their own aspirations for the child and their understanding of his or her needs. As their children grow and develop, good parents listen to their views and encourage their aspirations. It is the good parent who manages the services the child receives, not the agency or professional providing that service, and the securely attached child is not disadvantaged by changes in

personnel in the agencies providing services. When a child becomes looked after, he or she enters a system in which their care and upbringing is managed by professionals and paid carers. This has two major consequences for the child. Firstly, in addition to the problems of needing to re-form attachments, he/she moves into a world of paid, and sometimes changing, carers, where life is managed through formal and legal processes. Secondly, in addition to learning to cope with this world, they have lost the continuity of parental management of their access to services and opportunities.

2.4 For 'Corporate Parenting' to replicate the quality of care afforded by a 'good parent', each agency and professional involved needs to consider how they can be proactive, within their own remit, on behalf of looked after children, and for all agencies to strive for ever stronger collaborative working so that the whole of the 'corporate parent' can be greater than the sum of its parts.

2.5 The Corporate Parenting responsibility is shared by the Council as a whole. All members, not just those with an interest in Children's Services, are 'Corporate Parents'.

3. The Corporate Parenting Board

3.1 The Corporate Parenting Board first met in September 2006 and continues to meet quarterly.

3.2 In the past year the Corporate Parenting Board has received reports concerning:

- Children's Services quarterly performance.
- The Children in Care Strategy
- Independent Advocacy for children and young people
- Housing and accommodation issues for Care Leavers
- Feedback from the Change Council regarding the proposed homes closure programme
- Inspection outcomes

3.3 Some members of the Corporate Parenting Board undertake 'Regulation 33' monitoring visits to Children's Homes. Reports of these visits are reported to the Corporate Parenting Board.

4. Outcomes for Looked After Children

4.1 Under "Care Matters" all local authorities were required to develop a 'Pledge' to looked after children and young people. Sunderland's "Pledge" to children and young people in care was launched in 2011 (attached as Appendix 1). In Sunderland we have used this Pledge as a framework to develop the action plan and strategy for the Multi-Agency Looked After Partnership. It also gives a framework that allows us to judge how we are meeting the promises that we have made to the children and young people in our care, and how well we are performing towards the five improved outcomes that the pledge represents.

4.2 The Pledge is made up of the following outcome areas, how the local authority is performing against these outcomes will be described in the below report:

- “If you need to come into care, we will make sure that you are safe and properly cared for”
- “We will ensure that you are listened to”
- “We will help you to get a good education and enjoy your leisure time”
- “We will ensure you are supported to keep fit and healthy”
- “We will work with you to make sure you do not leave care before you are ready”

5. Characteristics of Children Looked After in Sunderland

5.1 At the end of December 2011 there were 398 children and young people looked after by Sunderland City Council. This is equal to 69.9 children for every 10,000 children in the general population of the city. This rate is a slight reduction on previous months where the snapshot was above 400 children.

5.2 The ethnic make up of the children in the care of the local authority has remained relatively stable, although the 5.5% of children who were from BME groups at the end of December 2011 is a rise on the 5.1% who were from those groups at the end of March 2011.

5.3 The types of placements used by Sunderland as at the end of December are shown in the below table, and illustrate the capacity of the component parts of the care system. At the end of December 2011 Sunderland had 209 Foster Carers and 6 children’s homes. The number of children in external placements can reflect capacity challenges, but also indicates the need to commission placements for some children from providers who offer specialist services that the authority cannot meet internally.

Placement Type	Children	%
Foster Care in Internally Commissioned Placements	235	59.0%
Foster Care in Externally Commissioned Placements	38	9.5%
Foster Care in Friends or Family Placements	22	5.5%
Internally Commissioned Children’s Home Placements	31	7.8%
Externally Commissioned Children’s Home Placements	15	3.8%
Children Placed for Adoption	30	7.5%
Young People in Independent Living Placements	7	1.8%
Children Placed with Parents under Care Order (or ICO)	20	5.0%

- 5.4 The length that children spend looked after by the local authority has changed over the past four years, with the average length of time in care reducing by 11 months to just under three years.

	Under 6 months	Under 2 years	2 to 4 years	Over 4 years
2011	72	126	67	133
2010	58	123	51	156
2009	64	101	59	164
2008	36	84	89	180

- 5.5 The above table shows that in December 2011 just over 50% of children had been looked after for more than 2 years. This is a significant reduction on the same figure for 2008, where fewer than 70% had been looked after for more than 2 years. Although the total population has been similar over the last four years, the proportion of long term looked after has reduced year on year.

6. Outcome One: “If you need to come into care, we will make sure that you are safe and properly cared for”

- 6.1 In order to measure how the children who come into care feel about their experiences, and the impact that being looked after by the local authority has on their lives, evidence can be shown from the Viewpoint system (see section 11.6 below for a full description of Viewpoint), and also from the placement information that describes a child’s journey through the care system.

6.2 Viewpoint Survey Results - What are Children’s and Young People’s thoughts about being Looked After in Sunderland

- 6.2.1 The Viewpoint survey has identified the satisfaction of children based on several dimensions. This has been aggregated to show the overall satisfaction – 82% of children identified themselves as satisfied. The satisfaction levels change with the age groups questioned – 87% of 10 to 15 year olds, 73% of 7 to 9 year olds, and 72% of 4 to 6 year olds.

- 6.2.2 Within this satisfaction total, there are key figures that show what children think about their placements and their experience of the looked after system. For example, 95% of young people feel “definitely safe” in their placement, while 5% feel “just about” safe. (Those children who reported only feeling “just about safe” were followed up to make sure that they were safe). It is recognised that the high level of positive responses to this question could be due to a lack of safety of in their previous home circumstances.

6.2.3 In all the age groups over 89% of the children said they felt “completely settled” or OK where they were living.

6.2.4 When children are asked whether they feel “Happy” and/or “Sad”, the figures show that two thirds report themselves as “Happy”, and a third report themselves as “Sad”. Although this is perhaps contradictory to the questions around satisfaction, safety, and being settled, it is an indication of the subjective nature of the child’s happiness.

6.3 Standards Monitoring of Placements (Regulation 33 and Ofsted Inspections)

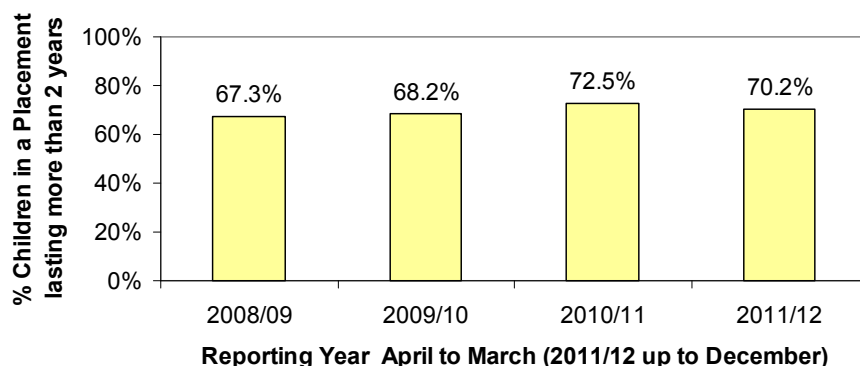
6.3.1 Unannounced visits to children’s homes under Regulation 33 of the Children’s Homes Regulations 2001 are carried out monthly by officers from the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit. They consistently report high quality of care in all the homes.

6.3.2 Ofsted inspects children’s homes twice per year, one full inspection and one partial (both unannounced). Currently, four of the five mainstream homes are judged “Good” and one “Satisfactory”. The Short Break unit for disabled children is judged “Outstanding” overall and “Outstanding” in every aspect

6.4 Stable Placements – Children and Young people can develop relationships and attachments

6.4.1 For children and young people who are looked after by the local authority, it is important that they have the same opportunity for the development of relationships and attachments as those children who live with their own parents. In this sense living in a placement that does not change improves the chances that children will feel happy and safe within that setting.

6.4.2 Long Term Stability - For children in long term care it is an important outcome for the child that a stable placement is maintained. At the end of December 2011, 124 children under the age of 16 had been in the care of Sunderland for more than 2 and a half years. Of these children, 87 of them had been in that placement for more than two years. This gives a Long Term Stability indicator of just over 70%.



NI63, Children looked after for more than 2.5 years and in the same placement for 2 or more years.

6.4.3 As is shown in the above chart, this is slightly lower than the figure that was reported at the end of the last reporting year (March 2011), although it is an improvement on the three year average.

6.4.4 Although there were 37 children who had changed placement within the last two years, only 12 of these were as a result of placement breakdowns. The remaining placement changes were made to improve the outcomes for the children; 22 children were either moved to a permanent placement, removed from unsuitable placement arrangements with their birth parents on orders, or were moved into specialist placements that were suited to their level of need.

Children Looked After at the end of December 2011 for more than two and a half years	124	%
In a Stable Placement for 2 years or more	87	70%
Have been moved in the last 2 years in order to improve their outcomes	22	18%
Have been moved in the last 2 years due to a placement breakdown	13	10%
Other reasons for Placement Change	2	2%

6.4.5 These positive placement moves would increase the indicator by 18 percentage points if they were included - i.e. 88% of children who were looked after for more than two and a half years were either in the same placement for more than two years, or had moved to a different placement to improve their outcomes.

6.4.6 Short Term Stability - For children who have been in care for less than two and a half years, it is equally important that they are given the opportunity of a stable environment. The indicator for short term stability looks at those children who have moved between placements at least twice during the year, and therefore a low percentage indicates positive performance.

6.4.7 At the end of December 2011, 37 children had moved at least twice during the year. This gave the indicator a value of 9.3% for the 2011/12 year so far. This is an improvement on the 2010/11 outturn, and well within the locally set target of 10.5% of children.

6.4.8 Nine of the children who had more than two placements were missing for more than 24 hours from one of their placements; these are counted in the indicator as placement moves, despite the young person returning to the same placement after their missing episode. If this effect upon the indicator is taken into account, the final figure would be at 7%.

7. Outcome Two: “We will ensure that you are listened to”

- 7.1 The Local Authority regularly reviews the care of each Looked After Child. These reviews are carried out by Independent Reviewing Officers, and give Children and Young People the opportunity to participate in decisions around their care. These reviews must take place at minimum statutory intervals, and a performance indicator measures how many looked after children have had all of their reviews in the year within these timescales.
- 7.2 In 2011 all Looked after Children aged over the age of 4 participated in their looked after review; this allowed the Reviewing Officers to listen to the wishes and feelings of each child, and take these into account when making decisions. Just over two-thirds (38%) of children and young people attended these reviews in person, but others either contributed in writing or had their views represented by a third party.
- 7.3 Since January 2010 a project has been in place to improve the way in which looked after children can directly participate in the review of their care arrangements. Staff have been dedicated to visiting children in foster care to assist the children prepare contributions to their reviews, using a computerised system called ‘Viewpoint’.
- 7.4 The ‘Viewpoint’ system provides young children with an attractive medium to record and express their views and wishes, in preparation for their Looked After Review. The process of conducting the questionnaires has shown that the Viewpoint format is very supportive for those less confident with reading and spelling
- 7.5 In 2011 this provided an alternative means of contributing to reviews for 176 children over a range of age groups. Although this was mostly for children in Foster Care placements, there was also a successful pilot period for children in Residential settings.
- 7.6 1133 Looked After Reviews were held for children and young people in 2011, and a further 1230 were held for disabled children receiving Short Break Care. There were 357 children who were looked after at the end of December 2011 for more than 28 days, and of these 343 had all of their reviews in the year within the set timescales. The outturn of 96.1% is slightly below that for 2010/11 (97.2%). However, it is within the top locally set banding of “Very Good”.
- 7.7 Participation and Consultation with Young People
Change Council: ‘Young People in Care Changing Lives’
- 7.8 The white paper ‘Care Matters’ which led to the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, directed every Local Authority to establish a ‘Children in Care Council’ with direct links to the Lead Member and Director of Children’s Services.
- 7.9 Sunderland has had a consultation forum for children and young people in care since 1999. In 2008 this was redeveloped, expanded and strengthened as our

Children in Care Council under its new chosen title of “Change:-young people in care changing lives”. Generally known as the ‘Change Council’, it meets monthly, has representatives on the Corporate Parenting Board, and communicates with the wider looked after population via its own new magazine ‘Change News”

7.10 In addition Change Members make positive contributions to service development and delivery in a variety of ways including delivery of training courses to staff, members, other professionals and carers both within Sunderland and regionally, participation in staff recruitment and selection, and contributions to policy and procedure development.

8. Outcome Three – “We will help you to get a good education and enjoy your leisure time”

8.1 Viewpoint Survey Results - Children’s views about their education and the support they receive

8.1.1 As part of the Viewpoint process, children were asked if they were happy at school. Just over two-thirds (68.4%) of children said yes, they were happy in school, and about a quarter (24.6%) of children said they were happy sometimes. Only 7% said they weren’t happy at school, these 4 children were all aged 7 to 9 years.

8.1.2 The role that the child’s carer plays in supporting their education was also examined through Viewpoint. Children and young people were asked if their Foster Carer or Key/Link Worker helped with school work; 74% said yes they received help, and another 6.4% said they received help sometimes. Those children aged 7 – 9 had the highest percentage of those who said they didn’t receive help at 27%.

8.1.3 Almost half of the 10 -15 yr olds said they would like more support or continuing additional support with their education, and the majority are having additional support.

8.2 Educational Attainment for Looked After Children

8.2.1 Education Outcomes for Children and Young People are measured in relation to children who have been in care for at least 12 months at 31st March; in 2011 190 children in this group were of school age.

8.2.2 Attainment for Key Stage 1 has improved in reading, writing and mathematics however Key Stage 2 shows a decline compared to the previous year. Educational attainments at GCSE/GNVQ stage have decreased since last year, however Sunderland is above the national average for 5 A* - C grades for Looked After Children in 2011.

8.2.3 *Key Stage 1* – There was a small group of seven looked after children who were in the Key Stage 1 cohort for 2011, however they were achieving broadly in line with their peers. In 2011 there was an improvement in results for reading, writing

and mathematics. Children achieving at least Level 2 in reading increased from 58% in 2010 to 86% in 2011, and compared to 84% for all Sunderland pupils. Children achieving at least Level 2 in writing increased from 50% in 2010 to 71% and mathematics increased from 50% to 86%.

8.2.4 *Key Stage 2* - There were 12 looked after children eligible to sit Key Stage 2 in 2011, with 17% having Statements and 33% at School Action Plus, therefore 50% of the cohort had special educational needs, compared to 38% in 2010.

8.2.5 The table below shows the percentage of looked after children in Sunderland achieving level 4 or above in English, Maths and both English and Maths. Although there has been a decline in those achieving Level 4, of the seven who did not achieve Level 4+ in English, four made progress of two levels and of the nine who did not achieve 4+ in Maths, five made two levels of progress.

	% achieving Level 4 or above			
	2008	2009	2010	2011
English	79%	42%	64%	42%
Maths	99%	47%	64%	25%
	Both English and Maths		64%	17%

8.2.6 *Key Stage 4 / GCSE's* - There were 31 looked after children eligible to sit GCSEs in 2011, of these 21 achieved at least one GCSE pass at any grade (71%).

8.2.7 The educational performance of the year group has to be seen in the context of the challenges facing this particular cohort. 35% of the cohort had statements of educational need compared with 3% of all Sunderland Year 11 children. 29% attended special schools (2% of Sunderland cohort) and 31% of the cohort have special needs assessed at School Action Plus (8% of Sunderland cohort).

8.2.8 The percentage of children obtaining at least 5 GCSEs grades at A*-G decreased from 64.5% in 2010 to 52% in 2011.

8.2.9 There were 11 children obtaining 5 or more A*-C this year in comparison to 14 children in 2010, representing 36% of the cohort (42% in 2010). However, Sunderland is placed above the national average of 31% for 5 A* - C grades for Looked After Children. Where English and Mathematics were included, 7% achieved 5 A* - C grades.

8.2.10 *Absences* – The most recent Department for Education published information shows that Looked After Children missed on average 5% of sessions due to overall absences over a two year period (2009 – 2010). This compares favourably on a national basis; the England average was 6% of sessions, and only 14 local authorities nationally achieved a better outcome than Sunderland.

8.2.11 *Personal Education Plans* - over 95% of school age children in care in Sunderland have an up to date Personal Education Plan.

8.3 Leisure and Recreation

- 8.3.1 The Viewpoint survey results reveal that children's access to sporting and hobby activities varies tremendously, as does the opportunity to see friends. Many children do accept there are restrictions to seeing friends due to distance or the need to keep them safe.
- 8.3.2 Sunderland continues to participate in the regional MAX Card scheme which enables many families and young people to participate in more frequent outings to cultural venues at a reduced or no charge.
- 8.3.3 Every Children's Home has an activity coordinator responsible for ensuring that all the young people are offered a varied programme of activities. Each home has a least one staff member who is 'Evolve' trained to approve external visits.
- 8.3.4 Recent discussions with colleagues in Leisure services have led to increased promotion of the benefits of the Concessionary Life Card which looked after children are entitled to. This card enables looked after young people to access sports and leisure facilities throughout the city at a reduced rate.

8.4 Looked After Children who Offend

- 8.4.1 Incidence of offending amongst Looked After Children is of concern in that it tends to be higher than for other children. However, it is important to recognise that the proportion of offenders amongst looked after children is very small and it is important to recognise that in general the vast majority of Looked After Children do not offend.
- 8.4.1 Reducing offending is a key priority of the Children in Care Strategy and there is a dedicated working group and action plan to address this
- 8.4.2 Offending is measured as the percentage of children aged 10 or over who have been looked after continuously for at least 12 months, and who were given a final warning/reprimand or convicted during the year for an offence committed whilst they were looked after. In the 2011 returns, 20 children (11.2%) offended, a ratio of 2.0 compared to children in the general population.
- 8.4.3 At the end of September 2011 the offending ratio was 1.9. This equates to 21 young people receiving substantive outcomes between April and September 2011 from a cohort of 198 (10.6%). At the end of September 2010 the ratio was 1.6 and 18 young people had received outcomes, 9% of the 2011 cohort.
- 8.4.4 Between April and September 2011, 232 missing episodes for Looked After Children were recorded by Northumbria police, 45 of which lasted more than 24 hours. 15 young people who went missing at least once, also received substantive outcomes during the period. These young people were responsible for 49.1% of all missing episodes by looked after children in the period, highlighting a link between young people who offend and those who go missing from placement.

9 Outcome Four: “We will ensure you are supported to keep fit and healthy”

- 9.1 Health outcomes for Looked After Children are measured as an average of the percentage receiving an annual health check, and the percentage having a dental check in the preceding 12 months.
- 9.2 In 2010-11, 85.8% of our children had an annual health check, and 88.6% had their teeth checked by a dentist. Both of these represent an increase over the previous year.
- 9.3 The average of these figures (87.2%) is consistent with our trend over the past eight years. This has placed Sunderland on a par with our statistical neighbours and the national average.
- 9.4 *Immunisations* - 96.5% of children looked after had their immunisations up-to-date at 31st March 2011; this maintains the same rate as 2010. This includes immunisations due before admission to care and during time spent in care. Where children did not receive immunisations for health reasons or because parents refused consent, these were counted as children whose immunisations were not up-to-date.
- 9.5 All children looked after aged under 5 had their development assessments up-to-date at 31st March 2011. This is an improvement on the 2010 figure of 97.8%.
- 9.6 Substance misuse was identified as an issue for 26 children (9%). Of those children, 16 were offered and accepted intervention to address their substance misuse.

10 Outcome Five: “We will work with you to make sure you do not leave care before you are ready”

- 10.1 129 children left the care of the local authority during 2011, most of them under the age of 16 and returning to the care of their parents, or a connected person who was assuming parental responsibility. Some of those returning home do so within a very short period, but most within approximately two years, depending on the time taken to work with the families to address issues of risk and parenting.
- 10.2 *Adoption* - The number of children who have left care in 2011/12 due to being adopted is 38. This is an increasing trend, and is one which points to more positive outcomes for those children. This is 29% of all children who left care, an improvement on the previous three year average of 21% which meant Sunderland was ranked as the eighth highest performing local authority in England by the Department for Education.
- 10.3 Although fewer than three quarters (73.7%) of children adopted in 2011/12 were placed with their adoptive family within a year of the decision of adoption being made, the average age of those children adopted is relatively high. 42% of children adopted are aged over 5, and in 2011/12 two children have been adopted after the age of 10.

10.3 The adoption service was inspected by Ofsted in November 2010 and judged good overall with four outstanding features. The report concluded that:

“This is an agency that undertakes its responsibilities to very high standards in most areas of its work and to exceptional standards in many areas the management of the service is outstanding”.

10.4 Young People Leaving Care over the age of 16

10.4.1 In 2011/12 30 young people left care over the age of 16, 20 of whom stayed in care up to their 18th birthday.

10.4.2 A survey of Care Leavers, called the Care Evaluation Survey, gathers views of young people’s experiences in care. The survey in June 2011 (completed by 15 young people) revealed that 92% felt they received help and support from Social Workers, Assistants and Support Workers. When asked to rate the overall help and support received from all professional staff, young people gave an average score of 5 out of 6.

10.4.3 The Leaving Care Service supports young people until the age of 21 years in line with the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. For those young people who are accessing higher education the Service remains involved until the young person reaches 24 years or until they complete their course. The Service holds statutory responsibility for these young people and ensures they have clear pathways in place to address their needs in relation to accommodation, education, training and employment and personal support. The Service works with approximately 180 young people at any one time and is staffed by social workers and support staff who are experienced in meeting the needs of young people.

10.4.4 Each year a small number of severely disabled young people in care reach their 18th birthday and require support from Health Housing and Adult Services into adulthood. In July 2009 the Futures Team was established in HHAS and jointly funded by Children’s Services to undertake person centered planning with all severely disabled young people likely to need ongoing support. Priority is given to young people for whom the Council is a corporate parent and this is already resulting in more individually tailored and community based arrangements for young people as they enter adulthood.

11.1 19 Year old Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation

11.1.1 The Leaving Care Service measures where Care Leavers are living, and what they are doing, around their 19th Birthday. In 2011 93.5% of care leavers age 19 were in suitable accommodation, which exceeded the target of 90%.

11.1.2 Sunderland has a range of accommodation providers that care leavers access. These include Burlington Close, (a six bed semi independent unit which is staffed 24 hours a day and supports young people to prepare for independence in a safe and supported manner, and associated trainer flat scheme which manages 14 properties) Holmewood (Gentoo supported scheme for young people), the

YMCA, TZ and Centrepoint. There is also a dedicated supported lodgings service.

11.2 19 Year old Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training

11.2.1 The proportion of care leavers who were in employment, education or training around their 19th birthday at the end of 2011 was 69%. This represents a reduction in performance from 82% in 2010, although this is indicative of the more challenging circumstances facing 19 year old care leavers in the last year, and it does meet the target that was set for 2011/12.

11.3 Higher/Further education

11.3.1 The Leaving Care Service currently supports 10 young people at University, the highest number yet. The Service provides financial support of £6,640.00 a year which ensures that the young person's fees and accommodation are paid for. Feedback from those young people who have succeeded in gaining university places indicates they feel well supported, at a level comparable to their peers who receive parental support. It is anticipated that next year 16 young people will be studying at University.

12 Services

12.1 Health Team

A dedicated health team, 'OK2,' oversees the management of health assessments for looked after children and is also available to provide advice and support. This team has community paediatric specialists and a Specialist Nurse for Looked After Children.

12.2 Virtual Head Teacher and Virtual School

12.2.1 Sunderland has had a "Virtual Head Teacher" with responsibility for the education of children in the care of Sunderland This includes those children in placements away from Sunderland.

12.2.2 Since 2000 every school in Sunderland has had a 'Designated Teacher for Looked After Children'. In 2008 it became a statutory requirement for all schools.

12.2.3 'The Virtual School' comprises three part-time teachers and an Inclusion Officer who advise and support schools and Designated Teachers, carers, social workers and others working to promote educational attainment of looked after children.

12.2.4 Personal Education Allowances are available to personalise the educational experience for our young people, including the provision of a range of equipment and services to support individual children.

12.2.5 Virtual School co-ordinates a range of initiatives to raise attainment:, all of which highlight the importance of targeted support to small groups of young people:

- Individual Tuition. In the past year 918 hours of one to one tuition has been provided.
- Letterbox Club: targets looked after children in Primary school years 3 and 5. Each child receives a brightly coloured parcel containing two books, fiction and non-fiction, a maths game, stationary items and a letter, usually from an author, every month for six months (May to October). The time period is selected to include the six week summer holiday period during which time attainment tends to dip. The reading ability of the children in the cohort was assessed before and after the programme, and the scheme is demonstrating considerable success.
- All looked after children in Y11 have a progression plan and all LAC in Y9 have enhanced support for their option choices.

12.3 Community Support Team

12.3.1 The Community Support Team has five main target areas of work:

- To provide help and specialist support to families and young people who are in crisis and identified as being at immediate risk of becoming looked after.
- To provide support to foster carers and children in foster care.
- To provide an 'on call' rota outside of office hours to include weekends and holiday periods in order to respond to situations that will result in the prevention of accommodation.
- Where young people have been accommodated on an emergency basis, to work with children, their families or extended family members to facilitate a return as soon as is possible.
- To work with young people who may have been looked after for some time, however with additional support may be able to return to their families sooner than may have been anticipated.

12.3.2 Referrals to the team have increased over the past year, with 130 referrals to support young people their families / carers.

12.3.3 Of the 108 young people and their families CST engaged with, only 6 young people went on to be accommodated, 2 of whom for reasons of child protection. 7 young people were supported in a returned from being in care to live with their families sooner than would have been anticipated. Of these 7 young people, only 2 subsequently needed to be re-accommodated. CST are still engaged with the 2 young people accommodated and 1 is to return to her adoptive parents mid February.

12.3.4 Upon closure of cases, practitioners give young people, their families and carers written feedback documentation for their completion. This documentation assists with review of service and enables improvements to service delivery. Responses remain extremely positive with no verbal or written complaints recorded by the

CST Coordinator. All written feedback is recorded in the CST feedback file, Parent/Carer feedback is as follows:

- 19 parents / carers rated the service as “excellent”.
- 4 parents / carers rated the service as “very good”.
- 21 parents / carers felt that they were fully involved with drawing up agreements for support.
- 21 parents / carers recorded that the length of involvement was just right.
- 1 parent / carer recorded that it was shorter than needed.

Young Peoples feedback

- 9 young people rated the service as excellent.
- 6 young people rated the service as very good.
- 3 young people rated the service as good.
- 14 young people recorded that all of the work was helpful to them.
- 4 young people recorded that most of the work was helpful to them
- 3 young people recorded that some of the work was helpful to them.

12.4 Independent Visitors

12.4.1 The Children Act 1989 requires the Local Authority to provide an independent visitor for any young person who does not have regular contact with members of their family. Currently Sunderland has a contract with Action for Children to provide up to 10 Independent Visitors, with provision to purchase additional Independent Visitors as required.

12.4.2 Independent visitors are volunteers from many walks of life who can support children young people in a variety of ways by befriending and assisting them.

12.4 Independent Advocacy Service

12.4.1 Since 2007 we have had arrangements in place to provide independent advocates for any child or young person wishing to make a complaint or representation about the service they receive from the Children’s Services. This is provided under the Advocacy Services and Representations Procedure (Children) (Amendment) Regulations 2004, and is available to any child or young person receiving or entitled to services, (not to parents or professionals).

12.4.2 Independent Advocates are experienced professionals with backgrounds in social care, health or education, and a sound knowledge of the care system and related services.

12.4.3 The service contract has been renewed for 2010-13 with Action for Children North-East Children’s Rights Service.

13. The Pledge

13.1 Under Care Matters all local authorities were required to develop a 'Pledge' to looked after children and young people. Sunderland's "Pledge" to children and young people in care was launched in 2011 (attached as Appendix 1). In Sunderland we have used this Pledge as a framework to develop the action plan and strategy for the Multi-Agency Looked After Partnership.

14. Care Planning and Review Regulations

14.1 The Government implemented the new statutory regulations and guidance for Care Planning and Review on 1st April 2011. The new regulations have increased the frequency with which Social Workers are required to visit children in care. They have also impacted on the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer which has been extended to allow more rigorous scrutiny of the establishment and implementation of Care Plans for individual children, and a greater frequency of contact with individual children in care.

15. Looked After Service Developments

15.1 Fostering

15.1.1 There is currently a target to increase net recruitment by ten fostering households per year. In order to help achieve this, a career progression scheme was introduced for all foster carers in April 2011. Its aim is to introduce personal development and the acquisition of skills and confidence, which will enable carers to provide high quality care for children with a range of needs, including permanence. There is an ongoing carer recruitment and marketing programme. The recruitment target is challenging due to the high level of competition from other local authorities and independent fostering agencies

15.1.2 Finance for the scheme is being provided by reducing the number of children's homes over time (1 children's home was closed in October 2011) and by reducing the use of external placements (increasing the numbers of carers will enable this to happen). Payment of fees is linked to carers' experience, skills and commitment and ensures that they are remunerated appropriately for the complexity and challenge of the work they undertake.

15.2 Adoption

15.2.1 The challenge for the adoption service is to maintain our good performance despite it now being harder to recruit adopters due to the national financial climate.

16. Peer Challenge

16.1 A Safeguarding Children Peer Challenge was undertaken in December 2011, as part of the improvement journey and in preparation for the anticipated Announced Ofsted inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Services.

16.2 The Peer Challenge identified a number of strengths in relation to services for looked after children, including:

- A number of strong outcomes for children and young people e.g. educational attainment for looked after children and adoption performance
- Recognition that we had worked hard to minimise the number of looked after children placements outside the borough
- Several specific service areas were identified as effective including fostering, adoption, looked after children, the referral process and pathways for children with disabilities, and the community support team
- Acknowledgment that the Council has prioritised children's social care in a challenging financial climate
- Success in recruiting new social workers, improving staff stability and experience in social work

16.3 There were also a number of areas for consideration, however none of those related to looked after children

16.4 Learning from the experience of the Peer Challenge will help equip services to prepare for the expected Announced inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After children, which will take place in the first half of 2012.

17. **Recommendations**

17.1 That the Scrutiny Committee notes the content of this report.

17.2 That given the Performance reporting year Scrutiny Committee considers changing the timetable for this report for future years until June, so that the full year performance can be considered.

17.3 That following Scrutiny's review of Corporate Parenting, members of Scrutiny may wish to request more regular or in depth reports on aspects of Corporate Parenting.

18. **Background Papers**

- Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice: Understanding the Councillors Role' (National Children's Bureau)
- Children's Services Performance Update 2011
- Corporate Parenting Annual Report to Scrutiny Committee February 2011

Local Authority Pledge to Looked After Children

Our Pledge to Children and Young People

- 1 We will support you to live with your own family or with relatives wherever possible.**
- 2 If you need to come into care, we will make sure that you are safe and properly cared for:**
 - We will ensure that being in care is a positive experience for you, that your needs are met and your hopes for the future are supported and encouraged
 - You will have a qualified social worker and we will not change the social worker unless it is for a good reason and it is discussed with you
 - You will be consulted about your care, and will have an up to date care plan which covers the things which are important for you and for your future
 - You will get the right support to help to do things you need to do because of your culture, religion or ethnic background
 - You will have a place to live with carers who will meet your needs
 - You will be helped to keep in touch with members of your family. If regular visits are not possible we will help you keep in touch by telephone calls or letters, and if you do not see your family for a long time we will make sure that important information about your family is kept for you
- 3 We will ensure that you are listened to:**
 - Your views and wishes will be taken into account when we work with you to make your Care Plan and you will be involved in any decisions about your life or changes in the services you need
 - We will explain things to you in a way that you will understand
 - You will have an Independent Reviewing Officer, to co-ordinate your looked after review, and whom you can contact in between reviews if you are concerned about anything.
 - You may have an Independent Visitor to support you if you need it
 - If you want to say anything about the service you receive you can have an Independent Advocate to help you to make a complaint, suggestion or compliment
- 4 We will help you to get a good education and enjoy your leisure time:**
 - You will go to the best school for you and have a designated teacher to make sure you get the help you need. We will not make you change school without good reason
 - You will have a Personal Education Plan which sets out what you need to achieve in school and what support you need to fully enjoy school life, including

going to after school clubs and activities, trips and educational visits, and extra help if you fall behind

- We will support you to enjoy leisure activities, including sport, music, the arts, hobbies, clubs and young people's organisations.

5 We will ensure you are supported to keep fit and healthy:

- You will get the best health advice possible from the health assessment team
- You will be offered a full health assessment and an annual health review which will be done in a way which suits you best
- We will make sure that you get the right services to deal with any health problems properly,
- We will help you to learn to look after your own health.

6 We will work with you to make sure you do not leave care before you are ready:

- If you cannot return to live with your own family we will help you to move into good quality accommodation,
- You will have a Pathway Plan which sets out the help and support you will need for your own situation
- We will support you to get further education, employment or training.
- We will give you practical and financial support if you wish to go to college or university.

1. We will Listen to you

2. We will Respect you

3. We will be Proud of you