

POLICY DEVELOPMENT & REVIEW 2011/12: PROGRESS REPORT

Report of the Chief Executive

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the progress in relation to the policy review, and related working groups, being undertaken by the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee around Early Intervention, Teenage Pregnancy and the Corporate Parent.

2. Background

- 2.1 Initial scoping documents were presented to the Committee on 21st July 2011 which set out proposed terms of reference for the review. At its meeting on 8th September 2011, the Committee considered a scene setting report for the review.
- 2.2 The Committee also established two working groups around teenage pregnancy and the Corporate Parent respectively. While these are separate pieces of work, it is acknowledged that there are strands to this research which will feed into the main policy review and provide some useful evidence.

3. As Soon As Possible: Early Intervention and Locality Services in Sunderland – Policy Review Update

- 3.1 Members of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee held a briefing session around the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), on Thursday 20th October 2011, as part of their review into early intervention. The key points arising from this meeting were as follows:
- The CAF process is a standard national approach to support earlier intervention by improving joint working and the sharing of information. The CAF process very much has children and families at its heart;
 - It was noted that the CAF is a voluntary process and there must be child or parental agreement before the process can commence. It was highlighted to the committee that a lot of work is undertaken to engage with families around this process;
 - CAF's can potentially be completed by anyone working with children and young people but most likely to originate from universal or preventative services;
 - The CAF is completed following 4 key steps identification of need, preparation, discussion and delivery;
 - Concerns were raised about the time consuming nature of the completion of the CAF form and how schools would cope with this, being one of the universal settings for early intervention;

- Each of the 5 locality areas holds a CAF panel meeting each week to discuss new CAF submissions. A number of agencies sit on the CAF panels including principal social worker, Educational Psychologist, CAMHS, Adult Services, Risk and Resilience Team etc. These panels discuss, allocate and provide support for the needs of young people and families identified through the CAF process, and;
- It was noted that parents have the option to comment on the CAF form for particular preferences and also services they do and do not want to engage with. If young people/parents remain reluctant the team will continue to try and persuade them or use other agencies to try and improve engagement.

3.2 Members also visited the North Area Locality Based Team at the Bunny Hill Centre, on Wednesday 2 November 2011, as part of the evidence gathering for the policy review into early intervention. The following key points were made:

- Early intervention and locality services are based in 5 localities across the City and provide services from pregnancy through infancy, early years, school years, adolescence and into early adulthood;
- Information supplied through the CAF is considered at a locality level at the weekly Locality CAF Panel held in each area;
- The CAF panel decides on the levels of support and course of action to be taken, be this single or multi-agency in approach. The Team Around the Family (TAF) approach is very fluid, is managed by an independent chair with the panel identifying key services that need to be involved in a particular case;
- The whole approach is very much geared towards working with families and gaining their confidence;
- It was noted that with a school referral via CAF the support services supplied by the LA would provide the required support recommended by the CAF Panel. However, if the school does not buy its services from the LA it would be very much dependent on that individual school in providing the recommended support;
- The Locality Based Teams were considering how to communicate this vision of early intervention into the community and a number of ideas were discussed including social media, community newsletter and the Lets Go Sunderland website, using partner agencies (Gentoo, Local Police Teams) etc, and;
- Members suggested it may be beneficial to extend the CAF Awareness training to Magistrates.

3.3 A meeting with representatives from the Department of Education (DfE) around early intervention was arranged for Monday 21st November 2011, but was unfortunately postponed due to travel delays in London brought about by adverse weather conditions. Negotiations are underway with the DfE to rearrange this meeting and once details are finalised members will be informed.

4. Teenage Pregnancy – Working Group Update

4.1 Members of the Committee visited the Bumps to Babies (B2B) project in Hendon on Wednesday 2 November 2011 as part of the evidence gathering in relation to teenage pregnancies. The key points from this meeting were as follows:

- B2B is run with involvement from Social Services, Children's North East, Education, Connexions, Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust, Bridge Women's Group and SureStart Plus;
- Staff work closely with young parents (up to 20 years of age) offering advice and support on a range of issues including parenting, benefits, health issues around themselves and their children, isolation, financial entitlements dependant on the individual circumstances, childcare, low self-esteem/confidence, housing and access to further education or training opportunities;
- Staff will assist in parental guidance by offering advice on routines, feeding, healthy eating, sleep, toilet training, behavioural issues and having time for themselves. The project also has a dedicated young father's worker who works with individuals or in a group, meeting weekly;
- B2B was popular with young mums due to the sense of continuity that allowed the development of relationships between staff and the young mums;
- There was a perception that Children's Centres were too formal and young mums felt they were looked down upon by older mothers, as there was still a stigma attached to being a teenage mum. However it was fair to say that others in the group had experienced helpful advice and were generally positive about the centres;
- The project also has a dedicated teacher and teaching assistant based in the unit providing maths education. The unit currently has 7 young mums attending and it was noted that for other subjects, specialist teachers were brought in from Sandhill View School. The teacher provides advice and home visits to young people who opt to stay in school and intend to return once their baby is born;
- The unit is more relaxed and removes much of the typical pressures of school from the girls and this helps ensure they remain in attendance, and;
- One young mum, who had an 8 month old baby, related her own experiences and explained that she had decided to attend B2B after the birth of her child following a word of mouth recommendation from a friend. The young mum also knew 2 other young mums who were attending the unit so would prefer to come along with them.

5. The Corporate Parent – Working Group Update

5.1 The first working group meeting took place on 17 October 2011 to begin investigations into the Council's role as a Corporate Parent. A number of key officers were invited to attend. The full note of this meeting is attached at **Appendix 1** of this report but the key points were as follows:

- The longer a child is in care the greater the achievement and that those in care achieved the best results and the data from Children's Services supported this statement;
- On the whole it was noted that LAC were performing well in relation to their ability and circumstances. The key issue is that young people moving into the care system do very well, the earlier the intervention the better the support and outcomes. The care and adoptive system provides stability for a young person;
- Tensions exist between leaving the care system and independent living with many young people becoming accustomed to the 'hurly burly' of living in a home compared to the stark contrast of living on their own, the isolation and loneliness;
- The care service offers the support and means to change young peoples expectations or disadvantages of being in the system, and;
- Within the care system there is endeavour to create a culture of good behaviour and positive school attendance. For young people entering the care system this begins immediately and care/foster workers are very proactive in encouraging positive behaviour and attendance at school with often very challenging young people.

5.2 A further meeting was arranged with the Leaving Care Team and this took place on 16 November 2011 to discuss the transition arrangements and preparatory work undertaken with young people who are to leave the local authority care system. Again a complete note of this meeting is attached at **Appendix 2** of this report but the key points are as follows:

- The Leaving Care Service was established in 1995 as part of The Children Act 1989 and subsequent Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. The service deals with approximately 200 young people aged between 15-18 years old, rising to 25 years old if in higher education;
- For some young people and carers there is an awful lot of anxiety surrounding their transfer;
- Each young person is allocated a social worker and information sharing meetings take place between workers with the case finally being transferred after approximately 6 weeks;
- The Integrated Children's System saw the introduction of a pathway plan for LAC with full ownership by the young person in consultation with other significant people in that young person's life;
- Income maintenance is available to 16/17 year olds living independently and NEET or where a training allowance is not paid. There is also a leaving care grant of £1400 available to set up home and buy essential items to live independently;
- The LA has 7 supported lodgings across the city with 9 available places. These supported lodgings are £124 a week bed and board with limited support, for the right young people. There is also a 6 bed supported accommodation unit at Burlington

Close which has 24 hour support and is used for the more vulnerable or at risk young people leaving care, and;

- The LA also has 14 trainer flats which are made available by Gentoo and help young people to adjust to independent living and are supported by staff from the Burlington Close unit.

5.3 The working group agreed that it would be relevant to this piece of work to visit both Burlington Close and Centre Point and work was underway to arrange these visits.

6. Expert Jury Day Event

6.1 The Expert Jury Event will be held on Wednesday 14th December 2011 and a separate report on the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee agenda provides a more detailed review of the event.

7. Next Steps

7.1 The date to meet with the Department for Education is to be re-arranged. Further evidence gathering activities will be developed around looking at holding a focus group with a number of agencies involved in the early intervention agenda, visiting the XL youth village project and looking at a best practice visit. **Appendix 3** shows the timetable for the policy review.

8. Recommendations

8.1 That the Committee notes the progress made in relation to the policy review into early intervention.

8.2 That the Committee notes the future evidence gathering activities as part of the review process.

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