

REPORT OF HEAD OF SAFEGUARDING

IMPROVEMENT ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

1 “Not enough pocket money”

- 1.1 A chart is attached to this report (see Appendix 1) showing the pocket money rates of other local authorities in the area. The average rates paid out are comparable although Sunderland pays its younger children more than other authorities and its older young people get slightly less.
- 1.2 Young people in the children’s homes receive money from various sources in addition to their basic pocket money. For example: the home provides additional money for activities.
- 1.3 Since April 2008 each young person has been entitled to an extra £33 per month to spend on activities through the Empowering Young People Project (EYPP) ‘Go Sunderland’ scheme. Money is allocated to a ‘smart card’, which enables young people to spend money on a wide range of activities throughout the Sunderland area.
- 1.4 Older teenagers who remain in education are entitled to claim Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), which is £30 per week during term time. A young person who has reached school leaving age but remains in full time education will receive £30 in EMA, £10.50 pocket money plus a total of approximately £11 per week from activities and EYPP budgets.
- 1.5 Younger children, under school leaving age, cannot claim EMA although they will still be receiving additional allowances in relation to activities and EYPP. During school holidays young people who are aged 14 and over can take part in Teenagers to Work, which is paid employment. As young people grow older they are also encouraged and assisted to obtain part time employment to supplement their income and provide useful insight into the world of work as they make the transition into adulthood.
- 1.6 An annual review of pocket money rates for all looked after children will take place, commencing in the budget setting exercise for 2009/10.

2 “Having a say about house furniture”

- 2.1 All the children’s homes try to involve the young people in the purchase of new furniture for the home. As a children’s home is a group living

situation not everyone can have their individual choice when furnishings are chosen for communal living areas although the views of all young people would be taken into account. Where possible young people always get a choice about how their own room is decorated and furnished. Like any family the home has a budget to work to so there are limits on what can be done.

2.2 The following comments are from homes' managers:

'The young people take an active part in selecting furniture and goods, which was evidenced recently by the purchase of the new TV'.

'Young people are consulted about house furniture at every opportunity eg: young people's meetings, notice board, suggestion box, one to one sessions and general conversations over throughout the days/weeks'.

'We had a young people's meeting and they agreed that they have a say in what colours rooms are decorated and choice of furniture'.

'The young people have designed the living room and chosen the colours for the hallways as well as choosing furniture for their own rooms'.

3 **"Having the same rules for staff and young people about having snacks"**

- 3.1 Although the ideal would be to have open access to food for all young people in most of the homes it is necessary to have some controls over access to food. This may be because the home is looking after a young person who destroys or contaminates food or has particular medical or dietary requirements (for example badly controlled diabetes or obesity). The need for open access to food and snacks must therefore be balanced with the need to maintain the safety and welfare of all the young people in the home. It would be irresponsible to allow a young person to over-eat when to do so would be very detrimental to health. As staff are fulfilling a parental role it is almost inevitable that there will be conflict over food.
- 3.2 With regard to the issue of staff eating when young people are not, there may be a number of reasons for this but an example would be when a member of staff has missed a meal-time, due to being out of the home, and needs to get something to eat when they come in (staff on sleep-in will be on duty over a 24 hour period). If a young person has already eaten an adequate meal it may be perfectly reasonable to refuse to allow them to eat more food.
- 3.3 Feedback received from young people in the homes suggests that this issue is not perceived as a problem and there is no widespread support for rules about having snacks. However, if a young person feels

strongly that he/she would like some rules about having snacks then the appropriate place to sort this out would be at a young people's meeting when everyone who lives in the home can have a say.

3.4 Homes' managers have made these comments:

'Fresh fruit is provided for young people between meals and crisps and biscuits are provided at supper time. We have a house rule where young people can have tea and biscuits when they return from school while they are awaiting the evening meal. Sometimes staff and young people do have their meals outside of the house slots – if they have been to court, college, meetings etc and have not had any lunch'.

'The rules (about snacks) are the same for staff and young people as we find that this makes it easier to deliver consistent practice and it ensures that no mixed messages are given to young people'.

4 “Young people were not consulted about staff moves”

- 4.1 Some young people have been unhappy with the staff moves that happened as a result of Wellesley closing down and the closure of Avenue Vivian last year.
- 4.2 During the planning for the Wellesley closure the young people who were living in the homes that would be affected were kept informed of what was happening so consultation was undertaken.
- 4.3 The closure took place over two years and homes in Sunderland had to hold vacancies open so that the staff who were moving from Wellesley would have jobs to move into.
- 4.4 A year after Wellesley closed Avenue Vivian was also closed, necessitating a further transfer of staff to other homes. This was a difficult process, which was done in line with local authority procedures, employment legislation and with the oversight of Human Resources and the trades unions. Staff **had** to be matched to posts that were of equivalent grade and status.
- 4.5 It has been usual practice to involve young people in the recruitment of staff and this will continue to be the case. There are no more closures of children's homes planned so we will be able to return to the practice of managers recruiting to specific vacancies in their own homes. The managers will be able to agree with the young people living in the home at a 'Young People's Meeting' (which take place in the homes) how they will be involved in selecting staff to work at the home. The Residential Service Manager will also be available to attend a 4UM meeting to discuss how future recruitment will involve young people.

4.6 Interviews were held recently to recruit relief residential child-care workers and young people were invited to take part in the process. Although it was not possible for the young people to be part of the interview process itself, due to exam commitments, they did contribute a question for candidates.

5 “Staff spend too much time on paperwork/in the office and not enough with young people”

5.1 Over the last few years, with the advent of National Minimum Standards monitored by Ofsted, there has been a significant growth in the number of records within the homes which need to be completed accurately and in great detail. Managers and staff in the homes are all well aware of the impact of this administrative work required to support the ‘business’ side of residential child care and do their best to minimise it.

5.2 All the homes have a policy where staff try to complete administration tasks when young people are out of the home, at school or work.

5.3 However, many meetings and appointments which involve young people take place outside school hours so that they don’t lose time at school or work, which is as it should be.

5.4 As every appointment will result in some recording being necessary it is sometimes inevitable that staff end up being in the office. There are also telephone calls from social workers, schools and other agencies that the home receives after young people have come in from school.

5.5 The homes run their rotas so that there are more staff on duty when there are young people in the home. In most homes there will be three staff on duty when the young people are in the home but sometimes it could be less – for example: if staff are off sick, particularly at short notice.

5.6 Managers say:

‘Paperwork is an issue, but we try and cut paperwork off, from teatime, to spend time with the young people and complete an activity.’

‘Staff tend to use the day shifts for paperwork when the young people are at school or work placements and keep evenings for activities and quality time’.

6 “Some homes turn off electric in bedrooms to control noise”

6.1 If a young person is causing a disturbance by having their TV or music system turned up too loud then staff will always ask them to turn the

volume down. However, there are occasions when some young people continue to disturb other residents in the home (sometimes during the night) despite being asked respectfully to make less noise. As other young people need their sleep and usually need to be up early for school or work staff cannot allow one individual to keep the whole house awake.

- 6.2 Noise at night can also be distressing for neighbours in nearby properties and all the homes work very hard to maintain good community relationships.
- 6.3 In some cases the TV or music system might be removed from the young person's bedroom. However, it is not always practical for staff to be moving TVs around; especially in the middle of the night. Most of our homes have electrical wiring circuits that allow for a limited number of sockets to be switched off without the lights in the room being affected. This is only done where there is no compromise to safety and it is strictly time limited.
- 6.4 Feedback from both staff and young people the homes doesn't indicate that this is a widespread problem.
- 6.5 Young people thought it was fair that people should not be allowed to disturb others and keep them awake and, if the person wouldn't turn the noise down, that staff were acting appropriately when they switched the electric socket off to that person's room.
- 6.6 One young person said that this issue should be discussed at children's meetings. It was also suggested that there should be information in the children's guide about what happens when a person makes too much noise.
- 6.7 In one of the homes all the young people have agreed at a children's meeting that they wanted a policy in place to minimise noise and have all signed to confirm this.

Appendix 1

Pocket money rates by authority

	8yr	9yr	10yr	11yr	12yr	13yr	14yr	15yr	16yr	17yr
North Tyneside	/	/	£6.00	£6.00	£6.00	£8.00	£8.00	£10.00	£10.00	£10.00
Northumberland	£3.30	£4.00	£4.30	£5.00	£5.50	£6.00	£6.60	£8.00	£8.50	£10.00
Durham	/	/	£3.26	£4.20	£4.70	£5.60	£6.45	£7.65	£9.50	£12.35
Gateshead	£2.90	£3.35	£3.45	£4.45	£4.85	£5.35	£5.60	£6.65	£10.00	£12.60
Sunderland	£5.00	£5.00	£5.00	£6.00	£6.50	£7.00	£7.50	£8.00	£9.00	£10.50