

## CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

11 July 2011

### Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2010-2011

### Report of the Executive Director Children's Services

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: Learning City**

**CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT: Delivering Customer Focused Services**

#### 1 Purpose

- 1.1 To notify the Corporate Parenting Board of the report which went to Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee. This report informs members of the current position of the Council as 'Corporate Parent', to ensure they are aware of their role as corporate parents, of the current performance of the Council in meeting this responsibility, and of services and initiatives in place and under development to further improve outcomes for those children and young people to whom the Council has a parenting responsibility.

#### 2 Background

- 2.1 To assist Members new to the Corporate Parenting Board, the background context previously reported in 2010 is repeated in this report.
- 2.2 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...”
- 2.3 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 have found expression in the Children and Young Persons' Act 2008.

#### 2.4 Corporate Parenting

For more 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.

- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 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'.

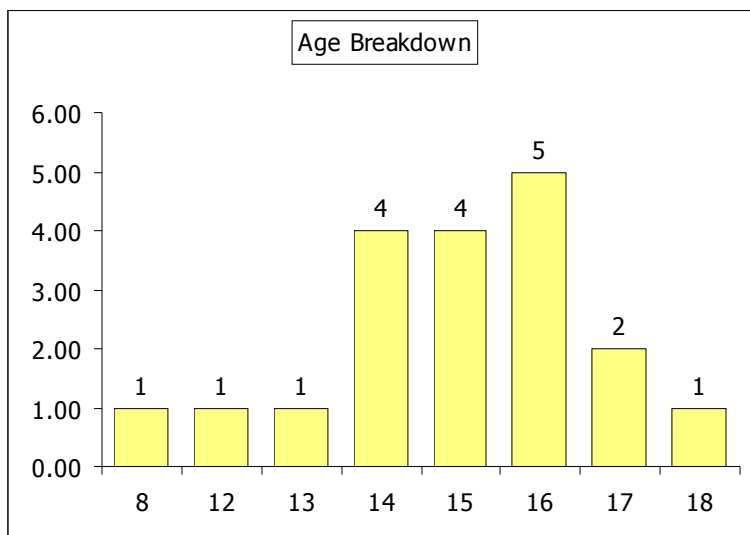
### **3. The Corporate Parenting Board**

- 3.1 The Corporate Parenting Board first met in September 2006 and has met quarterly since that date. At the first meeting the terms of reference were confirmed as set out in the Council Constitution and it was further agreed that the Board would report to the Children's Trust.
- 3.2 The Corporate Parenting Board continues to meet quarterly and in the past year has received reports concerning:
  - Children's Services quarterly performance.
  - Children who go missing from Care
  - Independent Advocacy for children and young people
  - Housing and accommodation issues for Care Leavers
  - Report from the Change Council regarding the work looked after young people are undertaking to help improve services and represent young people in care
  - Safeguarding Inspection Arrangements.

- 3.3 Some members of the Corporate Parenting Board have identified themselves as available to undertake 'Regulation 33' monitoring visits to our Children's Homes, and a programme has been developed visits are taking place.
- 3.4 Whilst all portfolio holders are represented on the board, the officer involvement remains concentrated on Children's Services. Discussions have commenced within the service to establish the most effective means of ensuring that the board is able to monitor the contribution of all council departments to the collective responsibility of 'Corporate Parenting' and hopefully to align the work of the Multi-Agency Looked After Partnership to the Board.

**4. Looked After Children**

- 4.1 Within Sunderland the total number of Looked After Children at any one time has been stable. At the end of December 2010 there were 387 Looked After Children and Young People, representing 68 per 10,000 of children under the age of 18 years.
- 4.2 While the overall numbers of Looked after Children remains stable, it is important to recognize that this is an ever-changing population. In the 12 months to the end of December 2010, 143 children and young people came into care and 146 left. Most children who come into the system return to their own families, or leave the system by being adopted or made subject to Special Guardianship Orders.
- 4.3 Annually a number of young people over the age of 16 years require the support of the 'Leaving Care Service'. This varies year on year between approximately 20 and 40 but averages around 30 young people. The overall rate of entering and leaving care has been reasonably constant over the past three years.
- 4.4 Figure 1 below, shows the age breakdown of children admitted to Local Authority Care in 2010.



- 4.5 It is important to recognise that this turnover means that a much higher number of children are affected by being in the care system than the population at any one time may suggest. Far from affecting only the 387 children under 18 currently in the system, the turnover indicates that of all children under the age of 18 in Sunderland today, over 2,400 will at some time in their lives experience periods in care, or have already been in care, or are currently in care. This rate has not changed significantly over the past three years.
- 4.6 Measurement of the Council's performance in relation to looked after children and young people is primarily based upon outcomes for those who have been looked after for at least 12 months as at the end of each September, formerly known as the 'OC2 Cohort'. The number at the end of September 2010 was 295. There has been a steady reduction over the years, from 329 in 2007, 315 in 2008, and 282 in 2009, so this represents a slight rise.
- 4.7 Of the 282 young people in this year's cohort, 205 (70%) were of school age. The largest growth in population of the OC2 cohort over the last few years continues to be amongst the 10 to 14 and 15+ age groups. 59.7% are boys and 40.3% are girls. (68.7% and 38.5% respectively in 2009).

## 5. Care Arrangements

- 5.1 As Corporate Parent, the Council uses a range of placement types to meet the varying needs of our children. Table 1 below shows the numbers of children according to placement type.

Placement Code	Inside LA	Outside LA	Total Children	%
Foster (Family) Placement	212	78	290	74.94%
Children's Home Inside LA	37	7	44	11.37%
Residential Schools		1	1	0.26%
Placed for Adoption	Not Stated		30	7.755
Placed with Parents	Not Stated		15	3.88%
Independent Living	Not Stated		6	1.55%
Other	Not Stated		1	0.26%

### 5.2 Family Placements

- 5.2.1 86.5% of all looked after children (including those placed for adoption or with parents) are in Family Placements. All children under the age of 10 years are in Family Placements.
- 5.2.2 There are 290 children in Foster Care. This includes a number of children who are placed with friends or relatives who have been assessed as carers.
- 5.2.3 30 Children are currently placed for adoption.

5.2.4 15 Children subject to Care Orders are placed with a parent under the 'Placement With Parents etc'. Regulations 1991

### 5.3 Residential Care

5.3.1 There are 45 children and young people, all over the age of 10 years, in residential care. This does not include young people with disabilities who receive short break residential care.

5.3.2 There are six small children's Homes in Sunderland which are the full-time homes for some children. A small number of children are placed outside of Sunderland in specialist residential placements.

## 6. **Placement Stability**

6.1 Stability is associated with better outcomes. Placement breakdown has a significant impact on children's well being and their friendships and continuity of access to other key services.

6.2 In the period until the end of December 2010, 31 children experienced three or more placement moves. This represents 8% of the looked after population. Where instances of young people going 'missing' are included in the data, this figure rises to 33 but is still below the target of no more than 10.5% of children in care experiencing such changes. Note that the third 'move' for some children is the move to a permanent family and represents a positive step towards permanence and stability.

6.3 Of children under 16 and looked after for at least 2.5 years, 69.6% have been in the same placement for at least two years. Whilst this is below the target of 74%, it is an improvement on last year's out-turn (67.1%) and better than both the regional average and that of our statistical comparators. It does remain an area for improvement. Whilst this group will include some of the most settled children it will also include a number of the most challenging.

6.4 In order to improve placement stability, placement choice and flexibility, as well as to reduce expenditure on external placements, the Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention Strategy was implemented in June 2009. This involved a significant increase in resources (£475k per annum in 2009/10 with an additional £140k per annum thereafter) which has enabled Sunderland to increase foster carer allowances to nationally recommended levels and provide additional budget for foster care workers (fee paid carers).

6.5 The fostering service was inspected by Ofsted in September 2010 and judged good overall with two outstanding features. The inspectors said:

*"Sunderland operates a strong fostering service that provides good outcomes for children...children are provided with outstanding support for their health and educational attainment"*

## 7. Health Performance Outcomes

- 7.1 The Health of Looked After Children is measured as an average of the percentage receiving an annual health check, and the percentage having a dental check in the preceding 12 months. (Data referred to is for 2009-10).
- 7.2 In 2009-10, 83% of our children had an annual health check, and 81.3% had their teeth checked by a dentist. Both of these represent a reduction over the previous year. This is possibly related to the older profile of the population (older children and young people can be less inclined to accept routine 'medical's'). Sunderland has a higher proportion of children aged 15 or over than our statistical neighbours, and a lower proportion of very young children, in part due to our relative success in achieving adoption as the outcome for younger children.
- 7.3 The average of these figures (91%) is consistent with our trend over the past eight years has placed Sunderland on a par with our statistical neighbours and the national average.

### 7.4 Immunisations

- 7.4.1 From the information provided, 96.5% of children looked after had their immunisations up-to-date at 30 September 2010; this had increased by 4% in comparison to last year, which in turn was a 4% improvement on the previous year. This includes immunisations due before admittance into 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.
- 7.4.2 97.8% of children looked after aged under 5 had their development assessments up-to date at 30 September 2010. This was below last year's achievement of 100% but higher than the preceding figure of 94.4%.

## 8. Education Performance Outcomes

- 8.1 Education outcomes performance is measured in relation to children who have been in care for at least 12 months as at the end of September. In 2010 this covered 295 children of whom 205 were of school age.
- 8.2 Attainment for key Stage 1 has improved in reading however Key stage 2 shows a slight decline compared to the previous year. Educational attainments at GCSE/GNVQ stage have also improved in all categories since last year.
- 8.3 Key Stage 1: The attainment of looked after children at Key Stage 1 has steadily increased from 2001 to 2005 in reading, writing and mathematics. Between 2006 and 2008 performance had declined in all three areas. However, this year shows the first signs of improvement since 2005 in reading, showing a 31.3 percentage point increase in comparison to 2008. There were 14 children in this group. See

Table 2 below. (The Letterbox Scheme (see 17.2.5. below) continues to have a positive impact here.)

- 8.4 Key Stage 2: There were 19 looked after children eligible to sit Key Stage 2, of whom 13 85% (68.4%) sat all Key Stage 2 tests. (up 16.6% from previous year). Table 2 below shows the percentage of looked after children in Sunderland achieving level 4 or above in English, Maths and Science, and some recovery from the decline in 2009. Note that the number of children in each case is small and there can be significant changes in the ability range of this group year on year.

Table 2

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
	<b>% achieving Level 4 or above</b>	<b>% achieving Level 4 or above</b>	<b>% achieving Level 4 or above</b>
<b>English</b>	<b>78.5%</b>	<b>42.1%</b>	<b>64%</b>
<b>Maths</b>	<b>98.8%</b>	<b>47.4%</b>	<b>64%</b>
<b>Science</b>	<b>85.7%</b>	<b>68.4%</b>	<b>73%</b>
<b>Both English and Maths</b>			<b>64%</b>

8.5 Key Stage 4: GCSEs and GNVQs

- 8.5.1 There were 30 looked after children eligible to sit GCSE / GNVQs in 2010, and 28 (93.8%) of these children sat at least one GCSE / GNVQ examination, a substantial rise over previous years. All 28 children achieved at least on GCSE pass (any grade).
- 8.5.2 The percentage of children obtaining 1 to 5 grades at A\*-G has also risen from 43.5% in 2009 to 64.5% in 2010.
- 8.5.3 There were 14 children obtaining 1 to 5 A\*-C this year in comparison to 7 children in 2009, representing 42% of the cohort and a significant improvement.
- 8.5.4 The figures in Table 3 below indicate that all our children passed at least one examination, 68% passed at least 5 GCSEs, with 28.5% achieving at least 5 GCSEs at A\*-C grades. This places Sunderland consistently above the national average for Looked After Children.
- 8.5.5 Where English and Mathematics are included in the A\*-C grades, our performance is 11.75%. However, it is not possible to compare with performance in previous years as a new measure (the number who obtained at least 5 A\*-C grades including English and Maths at GCSE or equivalent) has been introduced.
- 8.5.6 Members are reminded that there has been a steady improvement in GCSE attainment for looked after children since 2001, when only 8% of the cohort attained 5 A\*-C grades without the inclusion of Maths and English.

Table 3

<b>Attainment Level</b>	<b>Number of children</b>
Number in year 11 at school attempting any qualification at GCSE or equivalent (including entry level qualifications)	35 (100%)
Of these:	
- the number who obtained any qualification at GCSE or equivalent (including entry level qualifications)	35 (100%)
- the number who obtained at least 5 A* to G grades at GCSE or equivalent	24 (68.5%)
- the number who obtained at least 5 A* to C grades at GCSE or equivalent	10 (28.5%)
- the number who obtained at least 5 A* to C grades including English and Maths at GCSE or equivalent	4 (11.75%)

## 8.6 School Attendance

8.6.1 School Attendance for looked after children of school age is recorded at 95.1%, with 3.9% authorised and 1% unauthorised absence.

8.6.2 None of the cohort were subject to permanent exclusions from school.

## 9. **Leisure and Recreation**

9.1 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.

9.2 Every Childrens 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.

## 10. **Making a Positive Contribution**

10.1 The performance of the authority in ensuring that young people are supported to make a positive contribution is measured by the proportion who offend.

### 10.2 Offending

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 still very small. (It may also be the case that a looked after child who offends is more likely to be caught and convicted than a child who is not looked after). Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that in general around 95% of Looked After Children do



not offend.

10.2.1 Re-offending is measured as the percentage of children aged 10 or over who have been looked after continuously for at least 12 months, who were given a final warning/reprimand or convicted during the year for an offence committed whilst they were looked after. In the 2010 returns, 18 children (6.2%) offended, a ratio of 1:2 compared to children in the general population.

### 10.3 Substance Misuse

10.3.1 Substance misuse was identified as an issue for 24 children (8.3%). Of those children, 22 were offered and accepted intervention to address their substance misuse.

## 11. **Looked After Reviews – Performance**

11.1 The Local Authority is required to regularly review the care of Looked After Children. These reviews must take place at minimum statutory intervals: The first review must be no more than 28 days after a child enters the system, the second after no more than three months from the first, and thereafter at minimum intervals not exceeding six months. In addition review cycles change when a child is placed for adoption, and other statutory and internal procedures require reviews to be brought forward (e.g. Permanence Decision Reviews and Placement Order Reviews). The timeliness of their reviews is a Performance Indicator for the council.

11.2 In the rolling year to the end of December 93% of looked after children were recorded as having had all of their reviews in timescale. This is in the top banding for National Indicators although does represent a slight fall from 2009. (note that this figure may be adjusted upwards as at the time of reporting this data a number of reviews completed at the end of December 2010 were not recorded on the database).

11.3 The reviews are undertaken by a team of Independent Reviewing Officers working within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit. The team establishment is 6.5 full-time equivalents. In order to keep pace with the turnover of children in the system the Independent Reviewing Officer Team undertook 1224 Looked After Reviews in 2010 for looked after Children, (plus a further 140 reviews for disabled children receiving Short Break Care). Of these, 10 reviews (0.7% of all reviews undertaken) have been identified as out of timescale.

11.4 Local Authority Performance is also measured in relation to fulfilling the statutory duty to consider the wishes and feelings of each child and taking these into account when making decisions. This is measured as a percentage of children aged 5 or over who 'participate' in their Looked After Reviews. Around 50% of the children are actually present at their own reviews, with others contributing in writing, or indirectly by having their views represented by a third party.

- 11.5 The DCSF 'participation' definition enables us to record our current performance in this area at 100%. However we are concerned to improve the level and quality of direct participation, and in January 2010 appointed two part-time staff dedicated to visiting children in foster care to assist the children prepare contributions to their reviews using a computerised system called 'Viewpoint'.
- 11.6 The 'Viewpoint' system provides young children with an attractive medium to record and express their views and wishes in preparation for their Looked After Reviews and targeted on children aged 5 to 15 years in Foster Care. This provides an alternative means of contributing to reviews for over 150 children. In addition to facilitating individual children's contributions to decisions about their care plans, the system will also enable us over time to aggregate data about issues raised by young people to inform service development.

## 12. **Standards Monitoring (Regulation 33 and Ofsted Inspections)**

- 12.1 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.
- 12.2 Ofsted inspects children's homes twice per year, one full inspection and one partial (both unannounced). Currently, three of the homes are judged "good" and three "satisfactory". The Short Break unit for disabled children is judged "outstanding" overall.

## 13. **Placement Outcomes**

### 13.1 Return to Family

Most children who come into the care system return to their families of origin. Some 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. In 2010, the number of children who returned to their family was 65.

### 13.2 Adoption and Special Guardianship

13.2.1 26 Children left the Care system in 2010 by being Adopted and 5 by becoming subject to Special Guardianship Orders.

13.2.2 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".

## 14. Leaving Care

- 14.1 Within England at the end of March 2009 there is an increase in the number of children whom local authorities are in contact with after they leave care. The number with whom they are not in contact has fallen from 11 per cent to 6 per cent over the past five years. One third of care leavers are not in education, employment or training by the age of 19. Just over ten per cent of care leavers are still being housed in unsuitable accommodation after leaving care, according to Government definitions of what is suitable.
- 14.2 On average, around 30 young people annually require dedicated support from the Leaving Care Service to make the transition to adulthood and independence. In 2010 38 young people left care, 10 to independent living before they were 18, with 28, mainly those subject to Care Orders, ceasing to be in Care at the age of 18 years.
- 14.3 The Service works with young people from the start of Year 11 until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday (24 if they are in full time higher education). 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.
- 14.4 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 centred 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.
- 14.5 In 2010, 92% of young people who left care were still in contact with the Leaving Care Service around their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday
- 14.6 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.
- 14.7 Appropriate Accommodation for Care Leavers
- 14.7.1 In 2010 92.9% of care leavers were in suitable accommodation, against a target of 86%. Accommodation for Care leavers has been subject of more recent discussion at the Corporate Parenting Board, and Sunderland has access to a range of provision. However, the range of provision is constantly kept under review.

14.7.2 Services for Young People manage a six bed semi independent unit which is staffed 24 hours a day. This supports young people to prepare for independence in a safe and supported manner. The Service also runs a trainer flat scheme which manages 14 properties. The young people living in the flats have access to a floating support scheme including emergency support on evening and weekends.

14.7.3 Services for Young People also currently work with five supported lodgings hosts who offer a room in their home along with support to young people to help them prepare for the transition to independence.

14.7.4 Sunderland has a range of accommodation providers that care leavers access. These include Holmewood, the Gentoo supported scheme for young people as well as the YMCA, TZ and Centrepont, although not all of these are dedicated provision for Care Leavers.

#### 14.8 Employment of Care Leavers

Within Sunderland at the end of November those in employment, education or training had risen again in 2010 to 82% against a target of 62%. There remains a need to develop more options for training and employment.

#### 14.9 Higher/Further education

The Leaving Care Service currently supports 6 young people at University. (same as in 2009) 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 of our young people who have succeed in gaining university places indicates they feel well supported, at a level comparable to their peers who receive parental support.

### 15. **Participation and Consultation with Young People**

#### 15.1 Change Council: 'Young People in Care Changing Lives

15.2 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.

15.3 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, communicates with the wider looked after population via its own new magazine 'Change News' and an annual consultation day.

15.4 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. (see 17.1 below)

- 15.5 Members of the Change Council have also been involved in working to establish regional links with other 'Children in Care Councils', and three of the older Members have been involved in national meetings in London with Leaving Care Team staff to help develop government policy re employment for care leavers.

## 16. **Services**

### 16.1 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.

### 16.2 Virtual Head Teacher and Virtual School

- 16.2.1 In 2010 the Authority appointed a 'Virtual Assistant Head Teacher' with responsibility for the education of children in the care of Sunderland. This includes those of our children who are in care placements away from Sunderland.
- 16.2.2 Every school in Sunderland has had a 'Designated Teacher for Looked After Children' since 2000. In 2008 it became a statutory requirement for all schools.
- 16.2.3 The Looked After Children (Education) Team (LACE) has been redesignated 'The Virtual School' and 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.
- 16.2.4 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.
- 16.2.5 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.

### 16.3 Community Support Team

16.3.1 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.

16.3.2 Feedback from users of the service, both young people and parents/carers, consistently reports high levels of satisfaction.

### 16.4 Independent Visitors

16.4.1 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 the Authority has a contract with Action for Children to provide up to 10 Independent Visitors, with provision to purchase additional Independent Visitors as required.

16.4.2 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.

### 16.5 Independent Advocacy Service

16.5.1 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).

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

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

## 17. **New Developments**

17.1 Under Care Matters all local authorities are required to develop a 'Pledge' to its looked after children and young people. The current policy document is attached at Appendix 1. In Sunderland we have used this Pledge as a framework to redevelop the action plan and strategy for the Multi-Agency Looked After Partnership. The Multi-Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP) is revising its action plan to bring it in line with the details and substance of our 'Pledge' to young people (attached as appendix for reference). This was the outcome of a major development session held during the year where Managers from all partner services and agencies met with the full membership of the 'Change Council' to map out key areas for service development.

### 17.2 Care Planning and Review Regulations

17.2.1 The Government has issued new statutory regulations and guidance for Care Planning and Reviewing in March 2010. We are still preparing for the planned for implementation 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011, although there is currently a further review which may alter the proposed changes.

17.2.2 If the changes proceed as planned, there will be a requirement to increase the frequency with which Social Workers are required to visit children in care. (Estimates suggest this may double). It will also impact on the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer will extend 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.

### 18.3 Fostering Service Developments

18.3.1 It is proposed to introduce a fee paid scheme for mainstream carers linked to career progression. This will help Sunderland to compete more effectively with other authorities and agencies in the region in attracting carers. Finance for the scheme will be provided by reducing the number of children's homes over time, and by reducing the use of external placements (increasing the numbers of carers will enable this to happen). Payment of fees will be linked to carers' experience, skills and commitment and ensure that they are remunerated appropriately for the complexity and challenge of the work they undertake.

18.3.2 At present, the Communications team have been commissioned to pull together promotional literature, which will be sent to everyone on the IJM whose strengths profile fits with those of a Foster Carer.

18.3.3 If interest is shown by those staff on the IJM, to the prospect of becoming a Foster Carer, a workshop will be offered to provide more detailed information and an opportunity to have discussions with current foster carers. It is anticipated

that workshop(s) will take place by the end of February 2011, with the scheme formally commencing on 1 April 2011.

19. **Recommendations**

19.1 That the Corporate Parenting Board note the content of this report.

20. **Background Papers**

- Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice: Understanding the Councillors Role' (National Children's Bureau)
- Children's Services Performance Update (September 2009 OC2 Analysis report) January 2010
- Report to Review Committee re Corporate Parenting Board, February 2008
- 'Care Matters, Time for Change' 2007



## 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**