



# Looked after children commissioning strategy

**2013 – 2016**



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## Looked After Children Commissioning Strategy

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## PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY

This is the Looked After Children Commissioning Strategy for the Multi-Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP) for 2013-16. It also sets out commissioning intentions for the year 2013-14. See Appendix 1 for more information about the MALAP and its work.

Looked after children are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society and it is the responsibility of the local authority, as corporate parents, to support each of them, as individuals, to achieve their maximum potential. However, this **partnership** strategy recognises that a multi-agency approach is required to improve the life chances of looked after children and it sets out a clear framework for partners to plan and commission the very best services to meet the needs of children and young people who cannot remain in the care of their birth parents.

Increasing placement stability for looked after children is the major driver for much of the improvement activity within looked after children services. Children and young people who live in stable homes have greater opportunity to achieve good outcomes. This strategy therefore sets out how services in Sunderland work to support families to stay together where it is safe to do so, promoting preventative services and intervening at the earliest opportunity when difficulties arise.

Where children cannot remain in the care of their birth parents, our aim is to find appropriate permanent placements for young people, as early as possible, and support them to remain there. We also believe that, wherever possible, young people should be placed within the city, allowing them to have regular contact with their birth families where it is safe for them to do so. However, we recognise that this will not always be the case, so it is important that Sunderland has a wide range of placements, including access to some external placements, to accommodate children who may have some very specialist requirements. What we do not want, is to place children away from their families simply because we do not have enough capacity to keep them in Sunderland.

Placement stability, however, is about much more than having sufficient accommodation for looked after children. Many children who come into the care system have had very traumatic experiences, and need immediate support with their emotional wellbeing. A great number also need access, over time, to mental health services, as well as support throughout their educational career. Sunderland also has higher than average rates of looked after children offending and care leavers not in education, employment and training. Considering just these few examples, it is evident that we must have effective multi-agency support services in place to improve these outcome areas for looked after children.

All of this, of course, must be achieved in the most cost effective way. Partners must work together in new and innovative ways that will maximise outcomes within increasingly tighter financial constraints.

## VISION

Sunderland has long recognised the difficulties that the most vulnerable people face in their lives, and pays particular attention to these groups when understanding the needs of the city. This theme is evident throughout a range of strategic plans in the city including the Sunderland Strategy, the City Council's Corporate Plan and more specifically for Children's Services and for looked after children in the Children and Young People's Plan 2010-2025. More information about the overall vision for the city and how this feeds in to aspirations for looked after children, can be found at Appendix 2.

The MALAP's vision, solely for looked after children, is to:

*"... ensure agencies work together to improve outcomes for all children and young people who are looked after, or have been looked after, in order to give them the best opportunities to do well in life."*

To achieve its vision, the MALAP has developed the following specific principles:

- Children and young people are at the heart of what we do, will participate in decision making and be supported to make informed choices
- The family is recognised as a potential resource and partner and it is important to build on the family's strengths and those of the community in which they live
- To ensure the promotion of opportunity for looked after children who experience additional disadvantage arising from disability, ethnicity, cultural background, residence status, gender or sexual identity
- Children and young people participate in the design of services for them
- Children and young people will have swift and easy access to services.

In addition, and in partnership with looked after children, the MALAP has developed **The Pledge**, which is its commitment to children and young people in care. It details how it will support children and young people and how they can expect to be treated. It can be found at Appendix 3.

## NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

### National Policy Drivers

There are a number of national policy drivers requiring local authorities and partners to continually measure and improve the experiences of looked after children. The aims of these policies are to:

- provide a good range of suitable, quality placements for children who cannot live with their birth parents
- achieve permanent, good quality placements for young people as soon as possible after they come in to care
- support looked after children to achieve good outcomes in terms of their health and education

- guide looked after children to make positive lifestyle choices
- support their transition to adulthood
- ensure their views are sought and acted upon.

An overview of current national policy and relevant guidance can be found at Appendix 4.

## **Local Context**

In Sunderland, the outcomes gap between looked after children and those children and young people who are not in care, is too wide. The city is proactive in trying to narrow this gap and there are several plans in place to do this including:

- Children and Young People's Plan Strategy 2010-25
- Looked After Children Placement Strategy 2011-14, which includes:
  - Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Strategy
  - Foster Care Development
  - Children's Home Development
- Safeguarding Service Plan
- Post Ofsted Action Plan

In addition, at a corporate level, policy and planning is being strengthened towards early intervention and preventative services, specifically:

- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- Strengthening Families Strategy.

More information, including the main aims of these policies and plans, can be found at Appendix 5.

In addition, provided at Appendix 6 is an overview of statutory services for looked after children.

## **WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED**

Sunderland is proud of its record in maintaining stability in the number of young people in the care system which has remained at around 400 since 2005. Regional benchmarking and profiling demonstrates that this number is appropriate for Sunderland. There are a range of strategies and interventions which help to divert children from the care system, thereby maintaining that stability, and achieving permanence in a timely manner when they do need to be looked after. They are:

- An effective Community Support Team
- Strong kinship care work
- Good use of special guardianship arrangements
- Growth in numbers of skilled foster carers
- High number of children adopted.

## **Community Support Team**

The Community Support Team provides specialist support to families where children are at risk of being looked after as well as support to foster families to prevent placement breakdown. When children do become looked after, or have been looked after for some time, the team also works to return them to their families as soon as possible, where this is appropriate. They support families and foster carers with behaviour management techniques, including the “fostering changes” scheme, a behaviour management programme. The team is also available for consultation on individual problems.

The success of the team is demonstrated by the fact that in 2011, referrals increased by more than 100% (138 compared to just 67 the previous year). Of those, the service engaged with 108 young people and their families, successfully preventing 97 young people becoming looked after and helping five young people who were accommodated to return home to their families. Feedback from families about the service is excellent.

## **Strong kinship care work and good use of special guardianship arrangements**

A robust approach to **permanence planning** enables children to safely return home or move on to permanent families wherever it is in their best interests to do so. During 2011, over half of those children who left care under the age of 16, returned to their family or a relative with parental responsibility. From the beginning of April 2011 until the end of December 2011, 99 children under 16 were discharged from care. Of these, 42 children were returned to the care of their parents, and 15 children went to live with adults (usually other family members, such as grandparents/aunts/uncles, or close family friends) who had been granted Special Guardianship Orders or Residence Orders. These “Family and Friends Carers” play a vital and unique role in providing a stable environment for the children and young people they care for, who otherwise would go into foster or residential care, and many children and young people who live in family and friends care do well in life. In support of kinship care, Sunderland City Council has developed a Family and Friends Care Policy setting out the types of support and guidance it can provide to families living in these arrangements with an Information Strategy to support policy developments being available in Autumn 2012.

The full Strategy can be found at:

<http://www.sunderland.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=11229&p=0>

## **Growth in numbers of skilled foster carers**

In April 2011, Sunderland developed an invest to save strategy which included a career progression scheme for foster carers giving them the opportunity to progress to higher fee levels for caring for children with the most complex and challenging needs. This is supported by a strong professional development programme to ensure the appropriate training is provided to deal with young people’s needs. The council has also made significant investment in foster care recruitment when other services have been scrutinised for efficiencies.

These moves have sent out a powerful message to existing carers and potential recruits and made Sunderland an attractive option. In the last three years, 26 foster

carers have been approved and further assessments are awaiting approval. Nine independent practitioners have been recruited to improve speed of assessments.

### **High number of children adopted**

The Adoption Service uses innovative ways to place children appropriately and creatively, and it has driven the placement of older children and sibling groups. The average age of those children adopted in 2011/12 was relatively high, with 39% being over five years old, and two children over the age of 10. This performance ranks amongst the best in the country. It can, however, be more challenging to find suitable placements for these children, which does mean adoption planning can take a long time. In Sunderland we are below average for the time to do placement order proceedings, compared with the national position. There is some evidence that the courts locally are improving the timescales.

In addition, a project with Barnardos is looking at data on adoption planning in order to seek improvements in delays planning for very young children. Coram are carrying out a mirror project with some London Boroughs and the two are linking.

## **NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

In Sunderland, a Looked After Children Scorecard has been developed which details a total of 13 performance indicators, specifically looking at placements, reviews, adoption, care leavers and offending. This scorecard is continuously reviewed by the MALAP to challenge partners in achieving the very best outcomes possible for looked after children.

Monitoring performance of operational changes is very important, however for the purposes of this Commissioning Strategy performance trends over a number of years have been analysed in order to gauge where there have been sustained improvements or declines in performance. An overview of that performance is included below, with more comprehensive information and graphs/charts included at Appendix 7.

### **SERVICE USER VIEWS**

The views of looked after children and care leavers are central to the planning and development of services and there are a number of platforms in Sunderland to achieve this.

#### **Direct contact with looked after children**

In a consultation session with young people from the Change Council, in November 2012, they told us that young people in care mostly had good experiences, however they would want to see a number of areas improve. Highlights of that session are set out below.

## **Permanency**

- It can take a long time between coming into care and having a permanent placement
- All placements should be temporary in the first instance, to see how things work out for the young person and the family
- All placement moves should be explained thoroughly, i.e. whether these moves are permanent or temporary, why the move is necessary
- Young people should be invited to attend meetings, and have a say, in decisions that are made about them and where they will live
- Young people should receive a certificate to celebrate staying with a family.

## **Placement**

- If adoptive placement doesn't work out, young people should be given a second chance at being adopted. Age shouldn't matter
- Young people should be given more choice about whether they go into foster or residential placement
- If there are difficulties with a placement [due to young person's behaviour], the young person should be given a second chance before the placement is ended
- Social workers should be honest with young people and always tell them why a placement needs to change, even if the reasons are sad
- Social workers should listen to reasons why young people, who unhappy in their placements, ask to be moved
- Young people should be given an opportunity to see placements before they are moved to them.

## **Leaving Care**

- Young people become nervous when introduced to 'leaving care' as they think they are going to lose their family and live on their own at an early stage
- More leaflets should be available to help young people understand what leaving care really means
- The preparation for independence should begin as early as 13 years old
- Young people who had left care, felt they were well supported by their worker.
- Based on a survey of 308 care leavers, the [After Care report](#) from the Children's Rights Director for England found:
  - 46% thought they were made to leave care too early
  - 49% thought they had been prepared badly or very badly
  - 61% felt their lives had been made better as a result of being in care.

## **Health**

- Young people were quite happy receiving health assessments, but felt they could be more frequent
- It was also felt that they should be offered flu jabs

## **Education**

- Young people should be offered more help with learning, on a one to one basis
- The fact that someone in school is in care should not be well known, and young people should be respected to tell who they want to in their own time, rather than other pupils being automatically informed
- Young people in care are at greater risk of being bullied or singled out by other children
- Positively, young people in care are able to attend school trips without worrying how this will be paid for

- It is difficult for young people when they move placement, to integrate into a new school.
- The “Letterbox Scheme” was good and young people would like it to be available more often (currently once a year, would prefer once a term)

### **Further education, employment and training**

- Young people feel well supported by training agencies
- More help to write CVs would be welcomed as well as support attending interviews
- Specialised workers from Connexions provide a good service
- More looked after young people want to go to sixth form and college
- Young people felt that the provision of bus passes to attend further education was good
- Let’s go card good, but stopped

### **Viewpoint**

Viewpoint is an electronic system for gathering looked after children’s views on their experiences in care. This system is used by most looked after children at an age appropriate level, up until the age of 16, prior to their statutory review, and individual issues are worked through with the young person. However, the results are also aggregated over the year, to help gain a good understanding of levels of satisfaction that children and young people have with the whole service, and which areas need to improve.

The analysis from the latest overview report, from January to October 2011, can be found at Appendix 7.1, but some of the highlights are set out below:

- Over eight out of ten children say that they are satisfied with their care, and are happy in their placement. Almost all children say that they feel safe in their placement. The majority of young people report that they are healthy
- Almost half of the 10-15 year olds completing the survey would like more support or continuing additional support with their education
- Children in the 7-9 and 10-15 age groups would like to see their social worker more often.

### **Change Council**

Historically, the Change Council has been very well attended by young people, and also has strong links to the Director of Children’s Services, lead member for children and young people and the Corporate Parenting Board. However, the Care4me survey, conducted by Ofsted in February/March 2012, showed that not all young people are aware of the Change Council, which could mean not all young people’s views are represented.

In July 2012, a reorganisation of the Change Council was initiated, very much supported by the young people. It has moved from one group, to a structured forum, with an overarching group and a number of smaller delivery/project groups feeding into it. Each of these groups has a workplan with outcomes and outputs, and the young people who are part of these groups have real responsibilities in promoting the work of the Change Council, including to other looked after children.

In addition, Participation and Engagement Champions have been appointed. These are officer level champions from across the agencies of the Children’s Trust whose

role it is to support young people's participation across the board. Five Champions have been linked to services for looked after children.

The Participation and Engagement Champions, and the young people involved in the Change Council, are being trained to use the Hear By Right monitoring tool.

The Pledge to looked after children was launched in 2011, and looked after children were instrumental in developing this.

### **Care Leaver Evaluation Survey**

The Care Leaver Evaluation Survey is carried out when a young person in the Leaving Care Service reaches age 18. Wherever possible it is done with a key worker, but some young people prefer to complete it independently. It is designed to obtain the views of care leavers about their whole experience of the looked after system, including their foster carer or children's home, education, the leaving care service and their social workers.

The survey has already directly resulted in some improvements for care leavers, in that it has been suggested that the Leaving Care Grant be increased to ensure that all the necessary items can be purchased to live independently, and at the time of writing this strategy, this is being considered. Other information coming from the survey, is set out below, and a full overview can be found at Appendix 7.1:

- 60% of young people advised that their needs were met by the placements they stayed at
- Young people gave an average score of 3.5 out of 6 to describe how happy they were at school
- 84% of young people knew where they were going to live when they left care. In 80% of these cases, young people indicated the place they moved on to was where they wanted to live.

Some improvements to the ways that the Leaving Care Service gathers the views of care leavers have been identified. Looked After Children complete the Viewpoint survey up to the age of 16, and the next time their views are sought in a structured way, is when they are 18 years old and planning for independence. The Leaving Care Service will, therefore, explore the potential of extending the Viewpoint survey for care leavers up to the age of 18, and then carry out the Care Leaver Evaluation Survey at the age of 21. This will provide continuity of service and track young people's views throughout their entire time in the looked after system. Also, by delaying the point at which the Care Leaver Evaluation Survey is completed, it will allow young people to reflect on how they were supported in their independence planning. This will provide more meaningful information to support service improvements.

### **Independent Visitors**

Young people who do not have regular contact with their families can benefit from the support of an Independent Visitor – a trusted adult with whom they can spend time and enjoy recreational activities. Sunderland has a number of consortia arrangements with other local authorities in place. For Independent Visitors, consortia arrangements have been extended and a sub-regional contract is now in place to provide a more responsive service and the time between matching a young person with an Independent Visitor will be shorter through changes in process.

In the year 2011/12, ten young people were supported by Independent Visitors; as part of the new contract with the provider Action for Children arrangements are in place to ensure sufficient independent visitors are readily available should the number of children and young people requiring them increase.

### **Advocacy**

Looked After Children have clear routes for making complaints about the services they received and have a dedicated complaints officer. They also have access to advocacy services, which are commissioned from Action for Children. This arrangement has recently been re-negotiated on a fixed payment basis with an hourly fee for activity. In 2011/12, there were 11 requests for advocacy support. Of these 2 were self referrals and 9 were made by professionals working with the young people concerned.

In terms of contract monitoring, three young people from the Change Council's Advocacy Sub-Group play an active part in the monitoring of this contract, feeding in issues from young people and reporting back to them.

### **National Care Advisory Service Benchmarking Forum**

This is a young people's forum, which Children in Care Councils, including Sunderland's Change Council, link into. This forum has had some real success in influencing national policy for children in care and has frequently made presentations to the Children's Minister.

#### **Strengths**

- Ofsted recognised:
  - The views of looked after children and care leavers are central to the planning and development of services
  - The Change Council provides an effective forum for children to express their views about service provision
  - Children have good access to advocacy services and independent visitors
- The majority of care leavers feel they are fully involved in the development and review of their pathway plan
- Viewpoint – an electronic consultation system – is a good tool and is well used by young people to express their views on their placements and the services they use.

#### **Challenges**

- Ensure that social workers see children and young people alone and evidence this
- Not all looked after children are aware of the Change Council, which may affect the extent that all children's views can be presented
- The way in which care leavers views are gathered between the ages of 16 and 18 should be improved.

For more details about service user views, see Appendix 7.1.

## LOCAL DEMOGRAPHICS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

### Strengths

- The number of looked after children in Sunderland, as at 31 March 2012, was 388. This is equal to 69.2 children for every 10,000 children in the general population of the city and regional benchmarking suggests this figure is appropriate for Sunderland.
- The number of looked after children has remained stable at around 400 since 2005, despite national increases, and an increase in Sunderland of children subject to a child protection plan.
- The number of children in care for more than two years has reduced year on year since 2008. At the end of March 2012, less than half (48%) had been in care for more than 2 years. This is a significant reduction when compared to 69% in 2008. These figures suggest a shift to permanent care arrangements outside of the looked after system (e.g. adoption or residence orders).

### Challenges

- Whilst the length of time children and young people are in care has reduced over recent years, this downward trend must continue to ensure young people live in permanent, stable homes as soon as possible.

For more details about the demographics of looked after children, see Appendix 7.2.

## PLACEMENTS FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

For children and young people who are looked after by the local authority, it is important they have the same opportunity to develop relationships as those children who live with their own family. In this sense, living in a placement that does not change improves the chances that children will feel happy and safe within that setting (the Good Childhood report 2012, found that children whose carers changed, were twice as likely to report low wellbeing).

### Strengths

- Sunderland has an effective Placement and Resource Panel (PARP) which ensures that children do not enter the care system unnecessarily, and that entries to care are planned and matched to placements. PARP also ensures that unless there are safeguarding reasons to place children some distance from home, the majority of children are placed within the city, which facilitates contact and rehabilitation plans where appropriate.
- There is also a Multi-Agency Case Resolution Group (MACRG) which ensures that services and agencies involved in working with both children in need and those who are looked after do so collaboratively and productively. It does this by mediating to removing barriers, where they exist, to achieving planned outcomes for individual children. The group negotiates with partners involved with individual children to agree proposals for shared or additional resources to be sought, and to make recommendations for joint or extraordinary funding to the appropriate budget holders. It also works to put in place permanence planning for our children with the most complex needs.
- Permanence Monitoring Group, designed to monitor children who become looked

after and to discuss their permanence plans to prevent drift and delay. Advice is also provided on individual children and young people to ensure a plan for permanence for each looked after child is identified in a timely manner.

- The **Long Term Stability** indicator, at the end of March 2012, being 68.5%. The number of young people in long term placements has been relatively stable over the last four years, with improvements in the last two, and Sunderland is in line with statistical neighbours and national rates.
- Sunderland places the majority of its looked after children close to their homes. At the end of March 2012, only 6.4% of looked after children were placed more than 20 miles away from their home.
- The authority has been successful in sustaining high numbers of looked after children who are adopted, including some older and traditionally 'hard to place' children. Using the three year average of 2009-11, Sunderland was placed 8<sup>th</sup> in the national league table for the proportion of children who are adopted when they ceased to be looked after.
- To demonstrate the quality of foster care in the city, one of our foster carers of disabled children was awarded an MBE for services to children in 2012.

In addition, the Ofsted inspection recognised that:

- Looked after children live in safe and secure residential and foster placements.
- There is a clear partnership commitment on improving outcomes by placing more children in in-house family placements and reducing reliance on agency placements
- There has been strong investment in the recruitment, retention and support of foster carers.
- Foster care recruitment activity takes account of the ethnicity of the looked after children population to ensure that the ethnic background of carers reflects the diversity of children who are looked after by Sunderland.
- The effectiveness of externally commissioned placements is monitored well
- Suitable independent fostering agency (IFA) placements are monitored effectively through the sub-regional framework.
- The missing from care protocol is robust and residential staff and foster carers are aware of their responsibilities in reporting.
- From December 2012, the NE6 consortia arrangements will be in place, operating an approved provider list for externally residential placements.

## Challenges

- In 2011/12, 11% of looked after children in Sunderland were in residential care. There was no change since 2010/11. The challenge is, therefore, to reduce the numbers of children and young people in residential care and increase those in family placements.
- At the end of March 2012, 12% of the looked after children population were in externally commissioned placements – either foster care or residential placements. In order to drive efficiencies and continue to develop quality in-house provision, there is a need to reduce the usage of external placements. Actions contributing to this reduction will include:
  - Improvements to permanence planning and placement stability
  - Implementing the fostering recruitment strategy
  - Maintaining good performance in adoption rates, despite it now being harder to recruit adopters due to the national financial climate
  - Improve the timeliness of looked after children being adopted.

- Sunderland must also respond to the revision of the Ofsted inspection framework to ensure that the quality of children’s homes in Sunderland match expectations of external assessment.
- Support young people in care to work towards independence by providing independent living accommodation
- Maximise the use of children’s homes by offering accommodation to young people from other local authorities who cannot be placed within their local area

For more details on the placements of looked after children, see Appendix 7.3.

## WIDER OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

### HEALTH

Statutory guidance from the Department of Health states that *“Looked after children share many of the same health risks and problems as their peers, but often to a greater degree. They often enter care with a worse level of health than their peers in part due to the impact of poverty, abuse and neglect.”* Sunderland, therefore, takes a partnership approach to ensuring there is an effective range of support services that promote the physical and emotional health of looked after children and young people.

#### Strengths

- Ofsted acknowledged:
  - Initial health assessments and health reviews are mostly carried out on time and effectively identify the health needs of children and young people, including those placed out of Sunderland
  - Health outcomes for children and young people are good and most are above national average of performance
- Historically there has been good involvement of the Consultant Psychologist for looked after children in planning specialist placements where CAMHS input is required
- The designated professionals for LAC and CAMHS are actively involved in the training of foster carers and residential care staff on the health needs of looked after children

#### Challenges

- Whilst there are a good range of effective services and professionals looking after the health of looked after children, the Joint Inspection highlighted the need for Designated Professionals for looked after children to provide strategic influence, leadership and oversight for the health of looked after children. At the time of the inspection there was no Designated Doctor in post; this has now been remedied.
- The Council’s data shows that numbers of looked after young people and care leavers who become pregnant are higher than the national average. In Sunderland, in 2011/12, 15 care leavers became pregnant.
- As at 31 March 2012, 9.0% of all children looked after for 12 months or more were identified as having a substance misuse problem. This is in line with the 2010/11 figure of 9.1%.
- The local substance misuse screening tool is not used routinely in the annual

health reviews and this is a missed opportunity for identifying need for early intervention.

- CAMHS Service has undergone significant change linked to the recommissioning of services. Ofsted recognised this as a positive move which provides a wide range of therapeutic services, however, improvements are needed to reduce the length of time looked after children wait to access the service which NTW's Children and Young People's Service is committed to.
- Due to the changing services, NTW NHS Foundation Trust need to ensure revised pathways of care are effectively implemented for children and families who need specialist services from CAMHS.

For more details on health outcomes, see Appendix 7.4.

## EDUCATION

Looked after children often need support in their education for a number of reasons. They can sometimes fall behind through missing school, or by changing schools, particularly if their placements change. They have also often had very negative experiences in their life which impacts on their behaviour, making it very difficult to access learning.

Sunderland has a "Virtual School" which is dedicated to co-ordinating the educational support for looked after children. It is proactive in its intervention to support the learning and achievement of children at school and has a targeted approach to supporting children where there is a risk to continuity and progression

### Strengths

- Ofsted reported that:
  - Sunderland Virtual School (SVS) provides good training for designated teachers, education co-ordinators in children's homes and foster carers.
  - SVS also has a good range of expertise which spans the Early Years Foundation Stage to post-16, SEN and disabilities
- In the 2010/11 academic year, overall attendance rates were above the national average. Sunderland's 'overall absence' rate was 3.8% compared to national of 5.5%, meaning looked after children in Sunderland were absent from school less than the national average rate. These are the latest results available.
- Despite a decline in 2012, Key Stage 1 results for LAC in reading, writing and maths show a 3 year upward trend
- In 2012, Key Stage 2 results for LAC improved in both English and Maths, fluctuating over last 5 years
- Key Stage 4 results for LAC have improved in 2012:
  - % achieving 5+A\*-C including English and maths has improved from 7% to 12% which is in line with 2011 national results of 13% (2012 not yet published)
  - % achieving 5+A\*-C grades has improved from 36% to 48% and 5+A\*-G grades from 52% to 79%. 82% achieved at least 1 GCSE pass.

## Challenges

- GCSEs for looked after children are mostly positive, however there are real challenges when considering 5+ A\*-C Grades **including** English and Maths. No comparison figures are available for 2012, but in 2011 the gap between Sunderland's results and the national average was significant at 7% and 13% respectively.
- In addition, when comparing the same results against **all** children, there is a significant difference. Provisional results show that 63% of all young people in Sunderland gained 5 good GCSEs, and 59% nationally. The gap between looked after children and the rest is too wide.
- The Ofsted inspection of March 2012 identified inconsistencies in the completion of PEPs among partners and that targets and expected outcomes need to be clearer.
- The latest results available show that 13.8% of looked after children had at least one fixed term exclusion (FTE) from school in the 2010/11 academic year. Over the last four years, FTE in Sunderland have varied, and this trend needs to change to one of sustained improvement.

For more details on education and learning outcomes, see Appendix 7.5.

## OFFENDING

*Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care* reported that while a small overall proportion of children in care were involved in the youth justice system, they were still around three times more likely than other children to be cautioned or convicted of an offence while in care. Sunderland recognises this and its Youth Offending Service provides specialist support for looked after children who do come in to the youth justice system and has dedicated plans for improvement.

## Strengths

- The Ofsted inspection in March 2012, found that:
  - The therapeutic approach, Holding the Space, to prevent offending of young people in the children's homes is having a positive impact.
  - Residential care staff have also undertaken effective training in restorative justice approaches.
  - Joint work and links with the police are increasingly constructive.
- Public Health fund a part-time nurse to work with young people known to the Youth Offending Service.

## Challenges

- At the end of March 2012 the offending ratio for children aged 10, and over who have been looked after for 12 months or more, was 2.8. This is higher than the Northumbria average of 2.0. When expressed as a percentage, this equates to 16.1% for Sunderland, compared to 5.66% for the Northumbria region. The numbers of LAC Offending in Sunderland have increased over the year, from 11.2% in 2010/11.
- Even though LAC Offending has increased, analysis demonstrates that the actual number of offenders decreases year on year. This suggests that a reduced but more challenging cohort remains in the offending population, who tend to commit a higher number of reoffences.

- Just under a third of looked after children who offend do so for the first time after coming into the care system (28% between 2003-2011). Training for foster carers and staff in children's homes is therefore very important so they can recognise and manage these risks/behaviours.

For more details on looked after children offending outcomes, see Appendix 7.6.

## **SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

The need to identify children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation is gaining momentum with a number of major reports being issued by central Government and Barnardo's, etc. A recent Government announcement was also made for urgent action to help protect young people in residential care following two reports: one from the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) from the inquiry into child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups; the other from the joint inquiry into children who go missing from care.

### **Strengths**

- In February 2012, Sunderland appointed a project officer for a 12 month period, to work across agencies to support the development of preventative services for children and young people at risk of going missing and of sexual exploitation.
- A Shared Intelligence Group, an Operational and a Strategic Group to drive improvements in relation to sexual exploitation, have been developed. These groups all meet regularly and report to the Sunderland Safeguarding Children Board and the Safer Sunderland Partnership.

### **Challenges**

- Improve the way concerns about the sexual exploitation of looked after children and care leavers are identified and recorded.
- Raise awareness of staff into the importance of alerting services at an early stage where concerns of sexual exploitation exist, to support prevention and early intervention and to identify trends in patterns of activity.
- Support the Sunderland Safeguarding Children Board and the Safer Sunderland Partnership in implementing any recommendations from the OCC's final report due in Autumn 2013.
- Secure funding for a dedicated worker to work directly with young people at risk of sexual exploitation, and deliver training to professionals to identify the signs when a young person is being exploited.

For more details on sexual exploitation, see Appendix 7.7.

## CARE LEAVERS

The Leaving Care Service supports young people until the age of 21 and up to the age of 25 in accessing higher education. The Service works with approximately 200 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.

### Strengths

- Care leavers are well supported into suitable accommodation, and the proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation continues to improve year on year, reaching 98% in 2011/12, exceeding 86% target. Sunderland was placed 29<sup>th</sup> out of 152 local authorities nationally in 2011/12.
- Performance for care leavers in education, employment or training has been above similar areas and England and Sunderland was placed 33<sup>rd</sup> out of 152 local authorities nationally in 2011/12.
- There are strong links which support care leavers to engage in suitable training or employment opportunities, such as Connexions personal advisers, apprenticeships, work experience and Teenagers to Work programme.
- There is good flexibility for admission to vocational programmes for care leavers
- Young people going on to further education achieve good outcomes

### Challenges

- There is a need to reduce the number of care leavers not in education, employment or training, and there is strong corporate commitment to do this
- It is recognised by health practitioners working with looked after children that the current arrangements for providing a complete health summary to young people when they leave care is an area for development
- The transition from the Personal Education Plan to the Pathway Plan for care leavers needs to be improved
- The way in which care leavers views are gathered between the ages of 16 and 18 should be improved.

For more details on care leavers, see Appendix 7.8.

## RESOURCES FOR SERVICES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The social care budget is the highest within Children's Services, £14.25 million of which is allocated to services for looked after children. Ofsted recognised that Services for Looked After Children manages its resources well, ensuring that children and young people are placed in the most appropriate and safe placements, while maintaining overall value for money. However, Children's Services realises that its spend on external placements (£3.38 million in 2011-12), creates significant budget pressures, and is striving to reduce this.

### Strengths

- In 2009, one children's home was closed and the savings reinvested into foster care.
- Through the Budget Planning Framework 2011-15, Sunderland has responded to budget challenges and has secured additional permanent funding for external placements.

**Challenges**

- Sunderland must reduce its reliance on externally commissioned placements, not only to secure efficiencies but also to ensure it is providing the very best outcomes for looked after children.
- To build on the council's strengths, and continue to ensure that young people are in appropriate and safe placements, while maintaining value for money

For more details on resources for services for looked after children, see Appendix 7.9.

## COMMISSIONING INTENTIONS FOR 2013-14

Commissioning intentions for 2013-14, which will be reviewed on an annual basis, and refreshed in accordance with the needs of looked after children.

Commissioning intention	Action
Invest in Early Intervention services, to identify families' issues at the earliest opportunity and provide them with the support they need to avert crisis and prevent children coming in to the looked after system.	Support the implementation of recommendations for improvement resulting from the external review of the Common Assessment Framework.
	Support the development and implementation of the 'Strengthening Families' Strategy
	Consider the potential of the Community Support Team moving to locality based working to complement the new Early Intervention and Locality Services and whether this will bring additional improvements
Promote the wellbeing of looked after children by providing them with stable homes where they feel safe and secure and can form healthy attachments with adults	Ensure that social workers see children and young people alone and evidence this
	Continue to implement the Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Strategy
	Continue to provide Continuous Professional Development for foster carers to meet the challenges of caring for the city's most damaged children
	Ensure staff in children's homes are trained and supported to reduce the numbers of the children needing to be placed outside Sunderland
	Recommission 'Holding the Space' training so staff have the knowledge, skills and experience to work more therapeutically with the most challenging young people
	Development of four "move on flats" across the Monument View and Grasswell House Children's Home sites
	Explore feasibility of developing an alternative, specialised Children's Home to reduce the number of distant, very expensive placements
	Re-site Cotswold Road Children's Home to achieve a better match between the needs of the children and the community
	Explore feasibility of becoming an approved provider of the NE6 consortium
	Through regular monitoring of the NE6 consortia arrangements, ensure that external residential care placements for young people are appropriate and provide a stable environment for young

Commissioning intention	Action
	<p>people</p> <p>Maximise the opportunities for adoption by working in partnership with other local authorities to increase the number of training places for adopters and increase the independent practitioner pool. Promotion through media</p> <p>Respond to the revision of the Ofsted inspection framework to ensure that the quality of children's homes in Sunderland match expectations of external assessment.</p> <p>Ensure that robust and transparent reporting arrangements about the outcomes of Regulation 33 visits are in place</p>
<p>Ensure every child in Sunderland who needs an adoption plan, has the opportunity to be adopted</p>	<p>Expand on the promotional events held in Sunderland to encourage links between waiting adopters and waiting children</p> <p>Improved access to adoption medicals for children who could be adopted</p> <p>Explore enhanced financial support for potential adopters, particularly for large sibling groups</p> <p>Improve the timescales and the experience for approving adopters</p> <p>Speed up the journey time for adoption</p> <p>Participate with voluntary adoption agencies in a concurrency project</p>
<p>Ensure all children in care are supported to be healthy</p>	<p>Ensure that the role of the Designated Health Professionals for Looked After Children is explicit in HR transition processes and structures of the Sunderland NHS Clinical Commissioning Group</p> <p>Complete the review of the Looked After Children Specification ensuring the competencies and capacity of the Designated Doctor and Nurse for Looked After Children are explicit and in line with statutory guidance</p> <p>Develop quality assurance tools to monitor the health assessments undertaken on Looked After Children</p> <p>Monitor the pathways of care for children and families who need specialist support from CAMHs</p> <p>Ensure sufficient safeguarding budget to pay for Sunderland Looked After Children's Health Assessments when they are placed out of area (dependent on the locality these may still be covered by the Designated Nurse – LAC)</p> <p>Implement the Responsible Commissioner Guidance for Looked After Children (DH 2007); to implement the national tariffs for the undertaking of statutory health assessments; and to consider developing tariffs for children with/requiring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long term conditions and complex health needs (e.g. diabetes, cystic fibrosis, epilepsy)</li> </ul>

Commissioning intention	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CAHMS community and in-patient services</li> <li>• Disabilities</li> <li>• Hospital admission</li> </ul> <p>Improve waiting times for Looked After Children accessing CAMHS Services</p> <p>Work with NTW NHSFT to ensure revised pathways of care are effectively implemented for children and families who need specialist service from CAMHS</p> <p>Reduce the number of teenage girls in the care system becoming pregnant</p>
Provide good education services so that looked after children achieve good educational results and have a range of choices available to them after compulsory education	<p>Ensure the quality of PEPs is consistent</p> <p>Increase the educational attainment of all looked after children, in particular the number who achieve 5+A*-C Grades at GCSE including English and Maths</p> <p>Reduce absences among the looked after children cohort, and ensure they attend school</p> <p>Reduce the number of fixed term and permanent exclusions among looked after children</p> <p>Increase the number of looked after children and care leavers in Education, Employment or Training</p> <p>Introduce a dedicated worker solely to support care leavers that are currently at university or working towards university</p> <p>Continue to support care leavers at university until the age of 25</p> <p>Support care leavers to re-engage with the service post-21 should they decide to go to university at a later date</p> <p>Develop the Post-16 Personal Education Plan in conjunction with the virtual school.</p>
Support Looked After Children to make positive lifestyle choices	<p>Address Looked After Children Offending</p> <p>Ensure that the local substance misuse screening tool is used routinely in the annual health reviews for looked after children to identify substance misuse issues at the earliest opportunity.</p> <p>Reduce the number of teenage girls in the care system becoming pregnant</p>
Protect looked after children and care leavers from sexual exploitation	<p>Improve the way concerns about the sexual exploitation of looked after children and care leavers are recorded.</p> <p>Raise awareness of staff into the importance of alerting services at an early stage where concerns of sexual exploitation exist, to support prevention and early intervention and to identify trends in patterns of activity.</p> <p>Support the Sunderland Safeguarding Children Board and the Safer Sunderland Partnership in</p>

Commissioning intention	Action
	<p>implementing any recommendations from the OCCs final report due in Autumn 2013.</p> <p>Secure funding for a dedicated worker to work directly with young people at risk of sexual exploitation, and deliver training to professional to identify the signs when a young person is being exploited.</p>
Develop a Lifespan Service for children with disabilities, including those who are looked after	<p>In December 2012, establish a Project Team to make recommendations on the detail of a co-located service of professionals from agencies including children's and adults social work services and health disciplines</p> <p>Establish co-located Lifespan service in the early part of 2013.</p>
Ensure there are systematic processes in place so that looked after children have a voice, can participate in the design and development of services and their views are acted upon	<p>Review the systems for gathering the views of Looked After Children and Care Leavers and parents, so that each of these groups has an opportunity to express what it important to them, and to shape the services they receive.</p> <p>Promote the Change Council to ensure that all looked after children are aware of it, and have the opportunity to express their views through this forum.</p>

## **MONITOR AND REVIEW ARRANGEMENTS**

The MALAP will use this Commissioning Strategy to develop a Partnership Improvement Plan which it will monitor on a quarterly basis.

It will also feed into the outcomes of the Children's Trust.

The MALAP will also conduct a full needs assessment every three years, and use that assessment as a basis to commission appropriate services.

The review date for this Looked After Children Commissioning Strategy is September 2015.

# APPENDIX 1

## MULTI-AGENCY LOOKED AFTER PARTNERSHIP (MALAP)

In Sunderland we recognise that looked after children are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society. It is the responsibility of the local authority, as corporate parents, to support looked after children, but all agencies fully understand that if we work in partnership we will be able to do much more to improve the life chances of this group. That is the clear remit of the MALAP.

The MALAP is chaired by the Head of Safeguarding, Children's Services and also includes representation from the following services:

### **Sunderland City Council:**

Children's Social Work Service  
Services for Looked After Children  
Services for Disabled Children  
Youth Offending Service  
Commissioning Team  
Performance Management & Intelligence Team  
Sunderland Virtual School  
Workforce Development and Training Unit  
Leaving Care Services

### **NHS Services:**

#### **South of Tyne Foundation Trust**

Children's Lead for Commissioning  
Safeguarding Lead  
Designated Nurse, Safeguarding  
CAMHS Commissioning Lead

#### **City Hospitals Sunderland Foundation Trust**

Paediatric Consultant (Designated Doctor for LAC)  
Sexual Health Services

#### **Northumberland and Tyne and Wear Mental Health Foundation Trust**

Consultant Child Psychologist for LAC

## APPENDIX 2

### SUNDERLAND'S VISION

The Corporate Outcomes Framework, the highest level of strategic planning for the city council, promises that Sunderland will be ***“A city that ensures people are able to look after themselves wherever possible”*** and that it *“will safeguard and promote the welfare of those who are vulnerable by working with them at the earliest opportunity and making the best use of all resources available. This will include building on their own resources, skills and capacity, to ensure that they are and feel safe, cared-for and happy. If people need help we will help them find it and where appropriate provide it. We will offer them greater choice and control over the support they receive and the money that pays for it.”*

The Children and Young People's Plan 2010-25 states that the Children's Trust will *“Work together to improve life chances and aspirations for each child and young person in Sunderland, and to narrow the gap in outcomes for our most vulnerable groups and families”*. Looked After Children are recognised in that plan as one of our most vulnerable groups in our society.

## APPENDIX 3

### OUR PLEDGE TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE

The Pledge is a statement of intent by the council of our commitment to children and young people in care. This was developed in consultation with our children and young people in care and approved by the Corporate Parenting Board in 2009.

- **We will support you to live with your own family or with relatives wherever possible.**
- **If you need to come into care, we will make sure that you are safe and properly cared for**
  - We will ensure that whilst you are in care, 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 that is what you want and it is safe for you to do so. 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
- **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
  - If you have difficulty in telling us what you want, perhaps because of disability, communication problems, or English is not your first language, we will do all we can to help you express your views
  - You will have an Independent Reviewing Officer, to chair 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

- **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.
  
- **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.
  
- **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.

***We will Listen to you***

**We will Respect you**

**We will be Proud of you**

## APPENDIX 4

### NATIONAL STRATEGIES, POLICIES AND GUIDANCE

This Looked After Children Commissioning Strategy is specifically influenced by legislation and guidance in relation to Adoption, Fostering and the Sufficiency Duty, details of which are set out below:

- Government strongly believes that adoption is the best permanent option for children who cannot remain within their birth families. Currently, for looked after children who do go on to be adopted, the average time between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family is one year and nine months. Whilst recognising that it can be difficult to find parents for children with complex needs, this length of time is also associated with unnecessary delays in local adoption and family justice systems.

The government has published its [Adoption Action Plan](#) which sets out the first legislative changes that the government intends to implement to tackle delays in the system. Further measures to improve the care system for looked-after children will be published in the summer. Key proposals outlined in the Action Plan include:

- A revised approval process for new adopters, cutting it to six months. There will be a fast-track process for people who have adopted before, or who are already approved foster carers
- A national gateway to provide a first point of contact for anyone interested in adoption
- Targets for how long the process from entering care to being adopted should take. The target for the "child's journey" will be 21 months, which will gradually decrease to 14 months over the next four years
- New adoption scorecards for local authorities, which will measure performance against three key indicators: 1) the average time it takes for a child identified for adoption to actually move in with their new family; 2) the proportion of children who wait longer for adoption than they should; and 3) the average time it takes to match a child to an adoptive family. The scorecards will also include additional information on the timeliness of the local family justice system, and the numbers of older children being adopted.

<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/adoption/a00205069/action-plan-for-adoption-tackling-delay>

- Following extensive public consultation the Department for Education revised and modernised the **Statutory Framework for Fostering**. These changes came into force in April 2011 and include the Fostering Services Regulations, related statutory guidance and National Minimum Standards. These regulations form the legal framework for the running of fostering services and are relevant to every local authority or independent fostering agency, and to the local authority as a commissioner of a placement from an independent agency.

<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/fostercare/a0071234/regs>

- **Sufficiency: Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children 2010** - this statutory guidance provides clarification on the 'sufficiency duty' placed on local authorities, to secure sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of their looked after children. This duty requires local areas to do more than simply ensure that accommodation is 'sufficient' in terms of the number of beds provided. Local areas must also have regard to the benefits of securing a range of accommodation through a number of providers, capable of meeting different needs.  
<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DCS-F-00186-2010>
- **Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010** – specifies the requirements for care plans, including health and education plans, placement decisions and monitoring and case reviews.  
<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/childrenincare/a0065502/care-planning-for-looked-after-children-and-care-leavers>
- **Planning Transitions to Adulthood for Care Leavers: Statutory Guidance on the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010** - intended to ensure that care leavers are given the same level of care and support as a child who is not looked after child, and that they are provided with the opportunities and chances needed to help them move successfully to adulthood.  
<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/v/volume%203%20planning%20transition%20to%20adulthood%20for%20care%20leavers.pdf>
- **Children and Young Persons Act (CYPA) 2008** – this Act focuses on improving the stability of placements, enriching the educational experience and raising attainment of young people in local authority care or those about to leave care.  
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/23/contents>
- **Care Matters Time for Change, 2007** – requiring local authorities to establish the Children in Care Council, set out a 'Pledge' to children in care and emphasised the DCS and Lead Member responsibilities for leading improvements in corporate parenting.  
<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/EarlyYearseducationandchildcare/Page8/DFES-00541-2007>

## APPENDIX 5

### LOCAL CONTEXT

#### **Children and Young People's Plan 2010-25**

This ambitious multi-agency Strategy recognises looked after children as a specific vulnerable group and sets out the following specific plans to improve outcomes:

- improve emotional and mental health services for children in short term placements
- increase foster care recruitment
- reduce offending
- increase educational attainment
- create a stable establishment of social workers
- extend and refurbish three children's homes to improve the facilities and environment in which children in care live.

#### **Looked After Children Placement Strategy 2011/14**

This Strategy sets out the city's vision to maximise the number of looked after children in foster care, providing better outcomes for the majority of looked young people in care. The strategy will achieve this by delivering on the following key elements:

- **Foster Care Recruitment & Retention Strategy** – attracting and retaining the best foster carers for Sunderland children
- **Foster Carer Development** – developing our foster carers to meet the challenges of caring for the city's most damaged children
- **Children's Homes' Development** – ensuring that staff are trained and supported to prevent the need for children to be placed outside Sunderland.

#### **Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Strategy**

As part of the Looked After Children Placement Strategy 2011-14, the Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Strategy aims to increase the number of carers in Sunderland to improve placement choice and flexibility. The strategy has been well resourced with £475,000 invested in 2009/10 and £140,000 per annum thereafter, which has enabled Sunderland to increase foster carer allowances to nationally recommended levels. The significant investment in foster care recruitment, when other services have been scrutinised for efficiencies, has sent out a powerful message to potential recruits and helped nullify unfavourable comparisons with other agencies.

In 2012/13, there is a target to increase net recruitment by 20 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 which includes a partnership with Sunderland Football Club Foundation. The recruitment target is challenging due to the high level of competition from other local authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies.

## **Announced Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services**

In February/March 2012, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) undertook an announced inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services. This multi-agency inspection assessed looked after children services in Sunderland to be good across the board in terms of the headline judgements of 'overall effectiveness' and 'capacity for improvement', and the ten supporting judgements relating to specific outcomes and elements of service management. A multi agency action plan has been developed to address the issues identified by Ofsted and CQC. As well as picking up on the formal 'areas for improvement' identified within the inspection report, the action plan has also sought to address the 'softer' areas for improvement referenced throughout the report. The four formal areas for improvement identified for looked after children services were:

- Ensure that all looked after children, according to their age and understanding, are seen alone when visited by their social worker
- Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust (STPCT) to identify a designated doctor for children and young people to ensure that a health practitioner is in a position to have a strategic influence and overview on the health of looked after children
- North of Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust (NTWNHSFT) to monitor the effectiveness of the new pathways of care for looked after children and young people who need services from CAMHS
- Ensure that robust and transparent reporting arrangements about the outcomes of Regulation 33 visits are in place

The full Ofsted report can be found at: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/sunderland>

## **Safeguarding Service Plan**

This plan has been developed to support achievement of the outcome '*A city that ensures people are able to look after themselves wherever possible*' within the Corporate Outcomes Framework and delivery of the associated actions within the Corporate Plan. The Safeguarding Service Plan includes key objectives for looked after children services:

- Improved outcomes for looked after children through:
  - Total quality approach to care planning and pathway planning
  - Improved permanence planning and placement stability
  - Fostering recruitment strategy
  - Reducing the need for external placements
  - Maximising the opportunities for adoption
  - Raising awareness of the risks to young people associated with going missing and sexual exploitation.

## **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)**

Sunderland has developed its JSNA which reviews the needs of the population, in order to develop agreed commissioning, policy and planning priorities that will improve outcomes and reduce inequalities. The needs of looked after children are identified across two JSNA profiles, the main one being Safeguarding (children and young people) and they also feature in the Social Isolation profile. The needs identified in the JSNA are reflected within this Strategy.

## **Strengthening Families**

The Council and its partners are currently developing the '**Strengthening Families Strategy**'. This involves looking towards more integrated partnership working, to reduce future demand for targeted and specialist services, by supporting families with potential emerging needs and intervening earlier, focussing on early intervention and prevention to reduce the risk of families becoming vulnerable to poor outcomes and having a negative impact in their communities.

The principles of Strengthening Families reflect the needs and aspirations of the *whole family*; be underpinned by prevention and early intervention; take an asset based approach in order to build on families' strengths; and will be achieved through the integration of services around families.

### **Review of the Common Assessment Framework**

To support and strengthen early intervention in the city, Children's Services commissioned a review of its Common Assessment Framework. The purpose of the review was to identifying improvements required and put in place a clear improvement plan. The MALAP will support with the implementation of any recommendations that fall out of this review.

## **APPENDIX 6**

### **SERVICES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

#### **Fostering Service**

The fostering service is judged by Ofsted as Good overall, and Outstanding in Enjoy and Achieve and Health. There is currently a target to increase net recruitment by 10+ mainstream 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, which includes:

- A successful recruitment and retention scheme
- A new formal partnership approach with Sunderland football club through its foundation arm.

The 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. Resources for the recruitment campaign are available as a result of the shift away from external placements and the recent closure of a children's home.

#### **Children's Homes**

There are five children's homes in Sunderland with 32 places in total. In line with the plans to rebalance the number of children in foster care, one children's home, Williamson Terrace, was successfully closed in 2011. The plan was to close another home in 2012/13 to release efficiencies and reinvest this into foster carers. However, due to the increase in demand for residential placements experienced in 2011/12, it is proposed that the strategy should change to concentrate on further developing the skills of the staff teams, so that they are able to meet the ever more complex needs of Sunderland young people requiring residential care.

#### **Adoption Service**

The Adoption Service is a consistently high performing team with a very experienced manager and staff. The Service has been very successful in the numbers of children that have been adopted, including a high number of older children. Its performance ranks amongst the best in the country.

In December 2010, the Adoption Service was judged by Ofsted as Good overall, and Outstanding in Enjoy and Achieve, Making a Positive Contribution and Organisation. The report concluded: *"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"*.

Under the new Ofsted framework, and the raised expectations embodied in Ofsted's evaluation schedule, this judgement may change, but the values of the service and attitude of its staff will remain the same, and the service will strive to achieve good outcomes for children and young people.

## **Leaving Care**

The Leaving Care Service supports young people until the age of 21 and up to the age of 25 in accessing higher education. The Service works with approximately 200 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.

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.

## **APPENDIX 7**

### **NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

#### **7.1 VIEWS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS**

##### **VIEWPOINT**

Set out below are views of looked after children which have been aggregated from the Viewpoint surveys completed during the period 11 January to 31 October 2011.

##### **Emerging Themes**

In all the age groups over 89% of the children said they felt completely settled or 'ok' where they were living.

Almost half of the 10-15 year olds would like more support or continuing additional support with their education. In delivering the Viewpoint Programme it is apparent that some children have problems with literacy but are embarrassed or unaware of their difficulties and reject the idea of extra help. The Viewpoint format is very supportive for those less confident with reading and spelling. Children generally enjoy using the computer and especially like using the "read back facility". They sometimes comment that they would like the characters to have better voices and that they would like better games.

Qualitative questions 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.

Children in the 7-9 and 10-15 age groups would like to see their social worker more often.

##### **Views of specific age groups**

###### **10 -15 Age Group**

- 80% of girls and 77% of boys report that they are satisfied with Family and Social Relationships
- 88% of girls and 86% of boys are satisfied with their experience of being looked after by the City of Sunderland
- 89% of children had no health worries.
- Around 64% are engaged in exercise 3 times a week or more.
- Almost 50% of the children asked for additional support with their education. In most cases this was already in place and they wanted it to continue
- 89% of children are completely settled in their placement and almost 11% said they were just about settled.
- 82% of children said they got on very well with their FC or link worker.
- 46% of children were satisfied with contact with family
- 95% of children reported feeling safe in their placements.
- 83% of children said their social worker was definitely improving things for them.

- 73% of children felt their social worker had talked to them sufficiently about their review.

### **7-9 Age Group**

- 80% of boys and 75% of girls report they are satisfied with their health
- 62% of boys and 69% of boys are satisfied with their education experience
- 58% of boys and 59% of girls are satisfied with their Family and Social Relationships
- 74% of boys and 73% of girls are satisfied with their experience of being looked after by the City of Sunderland
- 67% said they were happy at school, with 10% reporting they were unhappy. 16% of children said they would like more help at school.
- 32% of children said they always feel sad, though could not always explain why.
- 89% of children are “ok” in their placement, with 11% saying they sometimes felt ok.
- 67% of children would like to be able to play out more.
- 19% would like to see their social worker more often.
- 16% saw their families when they wanted to and 42% saw their friends when they wanted to.

### **4-6 Age Group**

- 62% of boys, and only 20% of girls are satisfied with their Identity and Self Image.
- 74% of boys and 73% of girls are satisfied with their experience of being looked after by the City of Sunderland
- 90% of the children said their foster carer “told them when they had done well”
- 65% did not have friends to visit them.
- 40% were satisfied with the amount of contact with family.
- 55% say they are sometimes upset at school. These individual cases are always followed up and are usually because of typical childhood disagreements, and rarely because they are being targeted for being looked after.
- 25% did not know why they were living with foster carers
- 90% said they did feel safe.
- 70% seemed to understand that their social worker or foster carer was trying to help them and their family.

## **CARE LEAVERS SURVEY**

Over the period from April 2011 to September 2012, 37 young people provided feedback on their experience of the care system through the Care Evaluation Survey. The evaluation numbers in this case are low, therefore care should be taken when using this feedback as the information may not be representative of the broader picture seen by care leavers. As more evaluations are completed, a more comprehensive picture will therefore be obtained.

Nevertheless, the results are useful, and headline information is below:

### **Placements and workers**

- 60% of young people advised that their needs were met by the placements they stayed at.
- Young people rated their placements with an average score of 5.0 out of 6. 93% of young people felt they received help and support from Social Workers, Assistants and Support Workers. Young people rated the overall help and

support received from all professional staff, young people with an average score of 4.7 out of 6.

### **Education**

- Young people gave an average score of 3.5 out of 6 to describe how happy they were at school.
- From the comments analysed, many young people reported a sense of pride in attaining good results at school, and had obviously made many good friendships.
- 75% of young people advised they were involved in their Personal Education Plan.
- 78% of young people advised that if things got difficult, there was someone for them to talk to at school.
- When asked what advice young people would give to themselves if starting school now, most advised to 'stick in' more, don't give in, and try your hardest.

### **Improvements for young people in care**

When asked for any ideas or suggestions that would improve things for young people in care, responses included:

- Putting in place a rewards system for good behaviour
- Social workers should stay the same, be supportive, make regular visits, be honest and listen to young people and spend time getting to know them
- Provide more foster placements for young people.
- Give young people the chance to show they are mature enough to make their own decisions

### **Leaving Care**

- 89% of young people advised they were involved in their Pathway Plan.
- 59% of young people advised they were involved in Pathway Plan Reviews. When asked to rate Pathway Plan process, young people gave an average score of 4.3 out of 6.
- 90% of young people advised they were given information about their options for leaving care.
- 84% of young people knew where they were going to live when they left care. In 80% of these cases, young people indicated the place they moved on to was where they wanted to live.
- When asked how prepared they felt to leave care, young people gave an average score of 4.6 out of 6.
- A clear message coming through from the comments received is that young people valued as much time as possible to prepare for their move.
- When asked to rate the overall information you were given about living independently, young people gave an average score of 4.5 out of 6.
- 93% of young people advised they were given practical support to live independently. Of the practical support given, 89% of young people advised they received enough support to live independently.
- When asked to rate the support given to help you live independently, young people gave an average score of 4.8 out of 6.

## 7.2 LOCAL DEMOGRAPHICS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

On 31 March 2012, the number of young people aged 0-17 living in Sunderland was 56,100. The number of looked after children in this cohort is 388. This is equal to 69.2 children for every 10,000 children in the general population of the city.

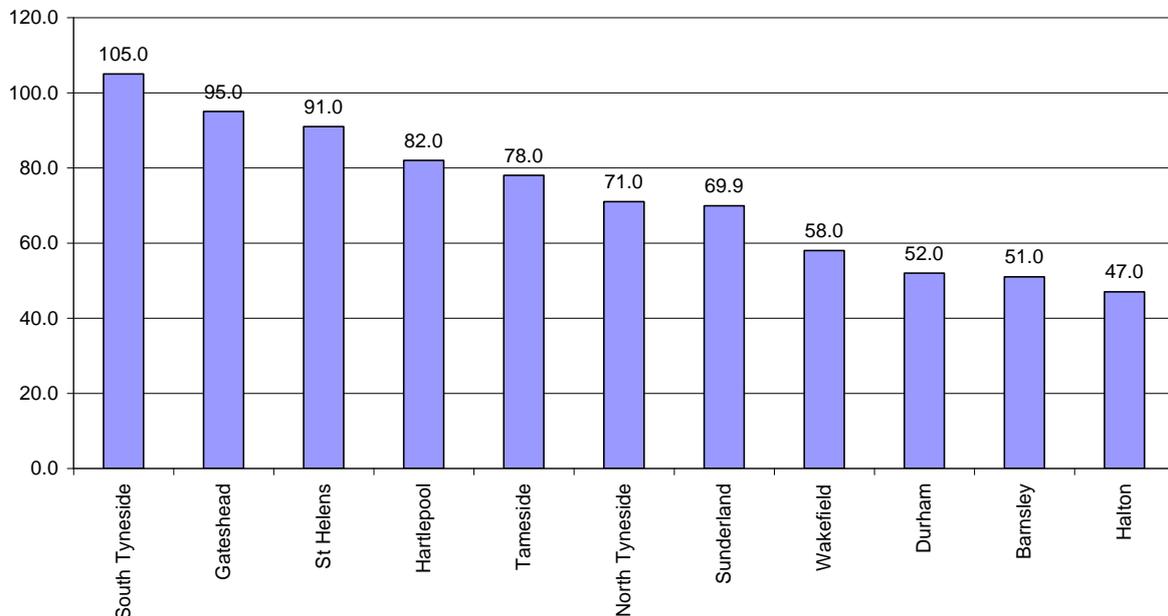
Of this looked after population, 174 were females (44.8%) and 214 males (55.2%). The majority of looked after children are white British/Irish (371 young people) with only 17 young people from non-white British/Irish communities.

The age breakdown of the looked after cohort was:

Age	Number
0	29
1-4	82
5-9	69
10-15	140
16-17	68

Despite national increases in numbers of looked after children (an increase of 2% between 2010 and 2011 an increase of 9% from 2007 to 2011), and the rise in the number of young people subject of a child protection plan in Sunderland since 2008, the number and proportions of looked after children in the city have remained stable, at around 400, since 2005.

**Looked After Children per 10,000 Population - Statistical Neighbours**



## Length of time in care

The length of time 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	% Over 2 Years
Mar 2012	68	133	60	127	48.2%
2011	72	126	67	133	50.3%
2010	58	123	51	156	53.4%
2009	64	101	59	164	57.5%
2008	36	84	89	180	69.2%

The figures suggest that children are staying in care for shorter periods of time, with lower proportions of children in care for over 2 years. At the end of March 2012, less than half (48%) had been in care for more than 2 years, compared to the 50% at the end of March 2011. This is a significant reduction on the same figure for 2008, where just under 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. These figures suggest a shift to permanent care arrangements outside of the looked after system (e.g. adoption or residence orders)

### **7.3 PLACEMENTS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

For children and young people who are looked after by the local authority, it is important they have the same opportunity to develop relationships 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 (the Good Childhood report 2012, found that children whose carers changed, were twice as likely to report low wellbeing).

#### **Placement and Resource Panel (PARP)**

The effective operation of PARP ensures that children do not enter the care system unnecessarily, and that entries to care are planned and matched to placements. PARP also ensures that unless there are safeguarding reasons to place children some distance from home, the majority of children are placed within the city, which facilitates contact and rehabilitation plans where appropriate.

#### **Multi–Agency Case Resolution Group**

The purpose of the Multi-Agency Case Resolution Group is to ensure that services and agencies involved in working with both children in need and those who are looked after do so collaboratively and productively. It does this by mediating to removing barriers, where they exist, to achieving planned outcomes for individual children. The group negotiates with partners involved in individual cases to agree in principle proposals for shared or additional resources to be sought, and to make recommendations for joint or extraordinary funding to the appropriate budget holders.

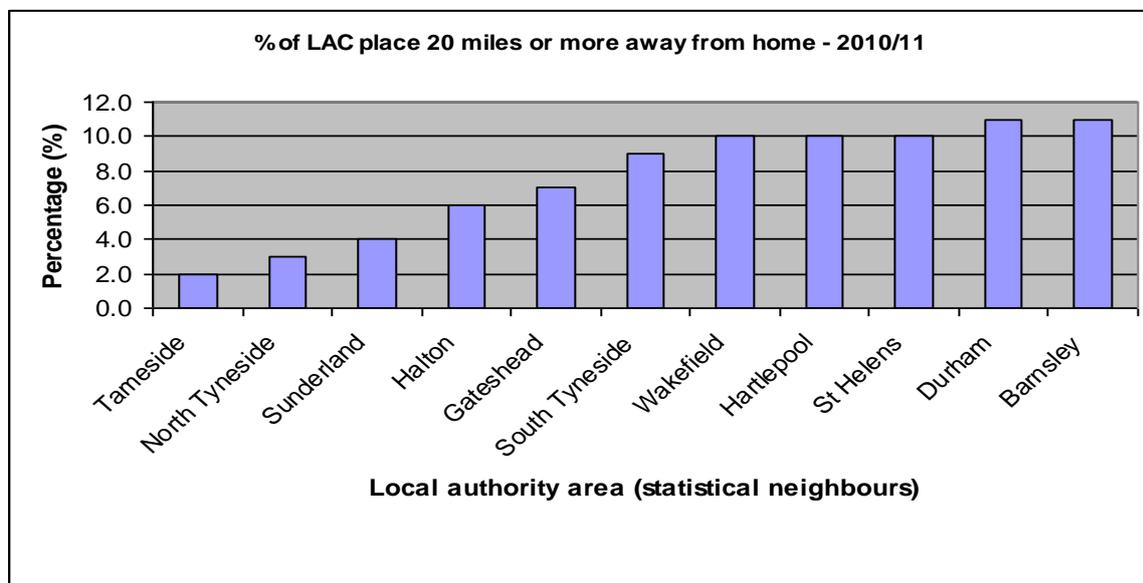
#### **Permanence Monitoring Group**

A Permanence Monitoring Group, comprising senior officers in social work service, fostering and adoption, meets to monitor children who become looked after. Social workers and Team Managers attend as necessary to discuss the plans of individual children to prevent drift and delay. There is also the opportunity for workers to attend for advice and consultation to ensure a plan for permanence for each looked after child is identified in a timely manner. To improve the challenge to this group, a request has been made to have a representative from the Independent Reviewing Service on the Group.

#### **Children placed out of the area**

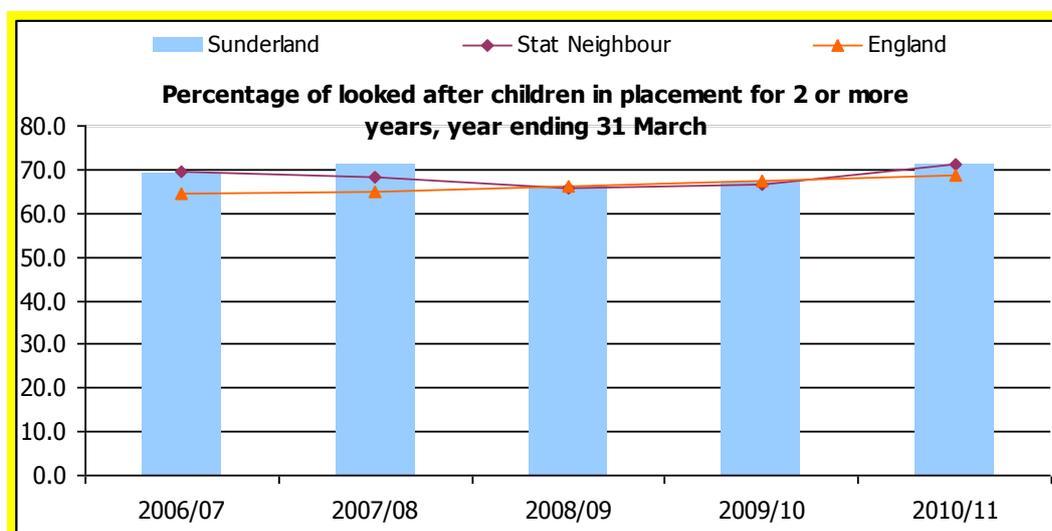
Since April 2011 each local authority has had a duty to secure, wherever it is “reasonably practicable”, a placement for each looked after child within the boundaries of the authority’s area. A placement within the city is recognised as not always being within the best interests of the child, and therefore not “reasonably practicable”. This means that specialist placements, which meet the most complex needs for children looked after by Sunderland, are used within the confines of the “sufficiency duty”, despite them being located outside of the city. However, there is now a focus from the DfE on those placements that result in children living more than 20 miles away from their home address. These placements, despite sometimes not failing the sufficiency duty, are recognised as potentially more challenging for the child or young person than those closer to home.

The graph below shows that just 4% of looked after children were placed 20 miles or more away from their home in 2010/11. At the end of March 2012, 25 young people lived more than 20 miles away from their home; this is a little more than 6.4% and an increase on previous performance.



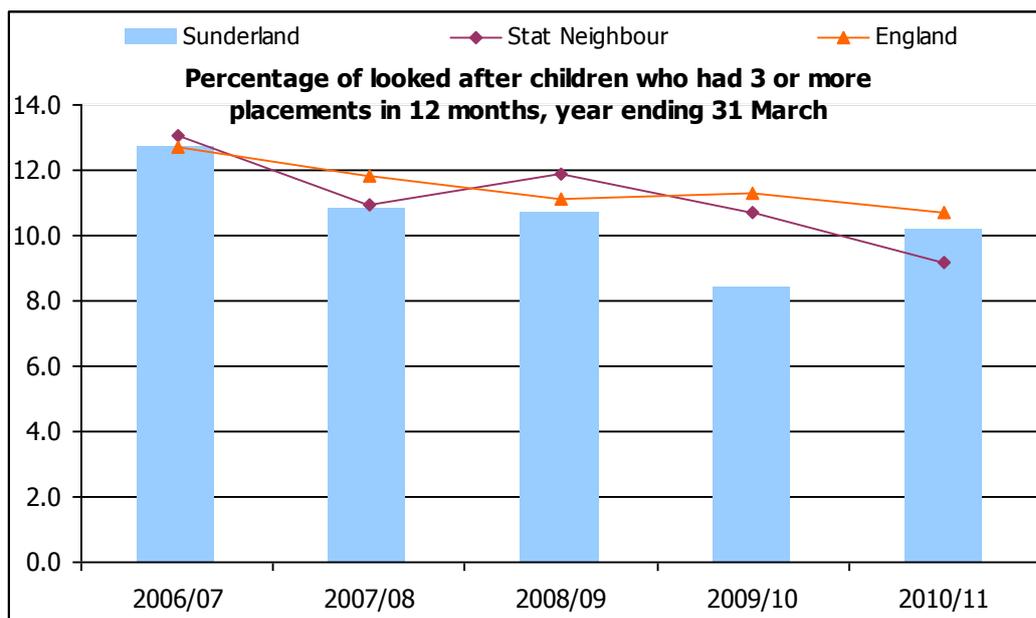
### Long term placements

When children do come into the care system, it is important to find an appropriate and stable placement for them, so that they feel safe and cared for. At the end of March 2012, 111 children under the age of 16 had been in the care of Sunderland for more than 2 and a half years. Of these children, 76 of them had been in that placement for more than two years. This gives a **Long Term Stability** indicator of 68.5% at the end of quarter 4 of 2011/12, which is in line with the previous year. The graph below demonstrates that young people in long term placements has been relatively stable over the last four years, with improvements in the last two, and that Sunderland is in line with statistical neighbours and national rates.



In terms of short term stability, i.e. young people who have had three or more placements in a 12 month period, Sunderland's rate has fluctuated over the last five years, but generally tends to be better than statistical neighbour and national averages.

At the end of March 2012, 46 children had moved at least twice during the year. This gave the indicator a value of 11.9% for the 2011/12 year. This is higher than the 2010/11 outturn, and outside the locally set target of 10.5% of children. However, when compared to children in the general population this is significantly higher; 5% of children in England moved their main carer more than once on the last 12 months (*Children's Society, 2012*).



A number of children and young people who move foster placements do so to achieve positive outcomes, in particular permanency or tailored specialist placement.

### Use of External Placements

Wherever possible, Sunderland places looked after children in in-house placements (whether these are foster or residential care) and within the city boundary. Sometimes, however, in-house placements cannot be used due to matching considerations, needs of the child, needs of existing children in the placements and carers circumstances. In these circumstances, external placements are sourced. At the end of March 2012, 11% of Sunderland's fostering placements and 33% of its residential placements were externally commissioned. Figures for neighbouring authorities are not available.

External placements are traditionally more expensive than in-house ones, which puts pressure on service budgets. As part of the budget planning framework 2011-2015 and prioritisation process, additional investment of £1.650m has been secured to provide a permanent solution to the budget challenges on external placements.

However, in order to drive efficiencies and continue to develop quality in-house provision, there is a need to reduce the usage of external placements. In 2011-12, Sunderland spent 24% (£3.38m) of its budget on external placements.

In order to ensure value for money and quality of external placements for children and young people in care, Sunderland is part of the **NE7**, a sub-regional framework which has been developed with six other local authorities in the region, to purchase **foster placements**. Sixteen providers have signed up to become part of the Independent Fostering Agreement (IFA) and where possible these are used first. In addition, a monitoring framework has been agreed and implemented to ensure quality of placements.

At times, however, it is necessary to purchase foster placements outside of the IFA and four additional providers are used for placements which are spot purchased on an individual basis.

It is also necessary, sometimes, to place children and young people in **residential placements** outside of the area. In these circumstances, placements are spot purchased. To improve the efficiency of these arrangements, the **NE6**, a sub-regional consortia approach to purchasing placements, is in place. Five neighbouring local authorities have joined with Sunderland to develop an approved provider list, which offers common shared referral systems and paperwork, shared monitoring, enhanced cross-authority information sharing to further support safeguarding and also seek to achieve better value for money.

### Placement types

The table below shows Sunderland's placement types in the year ended 31 March 2012.

Placement Type	Children	%
Foster Care in Internally Commissioned Placements	242	62.4
Foster Care in Externally Commissioned Placements	32	8.2
Foster Care in Friends or Family Placements	20	5.1
Internally Commissioned Children's Home Placements	30	7.7
Externally Commissioned Children's Home Placements	16	4.1
Children Placed for Adoption	29	7.5
Young People in Independent Living Placements	6	1.6
Children Placed with Parents under Care Order (or ICO)	12	3.1
Other	1	0.3

In 2010/11, Sunderland had 11% young people in residential care (8% Sunderland children's homes, 3% in external residential). This was higher than both national and statistical neighbour averages, which are both at 9%. Of our statistical neighbours, a number are equal, but none have a higher rate of young people in residential care. As at 31 March 2012, 12% of Sunderland Looked After Children were in residential care, though comparison of other authorities is not yet available. The challenge is,

therefore, to reduce the numbers of children and young people in residential care and increase those in family placements.

### **Quality of Placements**

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. Elected members regularly accompany officers on these visits and report back to the Corporate Parenting board. Children's Homes managers are given feedback following each visit and any improvements planned. Further improvements are required in this area to ensure that themes arising from these visits are identified and addressed through the Corporate Parenting Board.

There is an independent reviewing structure in place for both internal and external fostering placements. External fostering placements are monitored via the regional consortium contract.

In relation to external assessment, Ofsted has revised its inspection framework, and has considerably raised expectations in relation to service performance. Ofsted has informed local authorities that, despite continued improvements to services, judgements may be downgraded as a result. Between April and June 2012, three children's homes were inspected using these new criteria, and as anticipated their judgements reflect the new inspection schedule, with one home maintaining its rating, and two being reduced.

### **Children's Homes**

There are five children's homes in Sunderland with 32 places in total. In line with the plans to rebalance the number of children in foster care, one children's home, Williamson Terrace, was successfully closed in 2011. The plan was to close another home in 2012/13 to release efficiencies and reinvest this into foster care. However, due to the increase in demand for residential placements experienced in 2011/12, it is proposed that the strategy should change to concentrate on further developing the skills of the staff teams, so that they are able to meet the ever more complex needs of Sunderland young people requiring residential care. With this in mind, the therapeutic training 'Holding the Space' will be recommissioned.

To improve the transition for young people post-16, and help them to prepare for independence, Sunderland is seeking to develop four "move on flats". Young people who move into these flats will be fully supported by link workers from their existing residential placements, enabling a better assessment of their abilities, both practically and emotionally as they prepare to leave care. It also addresses feedback from both young people and providers of post 16 accommodation about how our care leavers are often unprepared for the isolation and responsibility of living independently. In addition, it will create capacity for another four young people in the mainstream Children's Homes, reducing the need for some external placements.

Some young people are placed outside of Sunderland in expensive "alternative to secure placements" when it has not been possible to maintain them in in-house children's homes due to the risks they present. We are therefore looking into the

development of outreach in- house provision as a lower cost alternative. This model of care would involve renting a property outside of Sunderland which would be used to provide short term placements, intensive staffing, support and structure to young people at risk of placement breakdown. It would also have the advantage of increasing the likelihood of them being able to return to their placement in a mainstream in-house children's home once their behaviour had settled.

It is also the case that some young people cannot be placed within the city, due to matching considerations or safeguarding reasons. The same is true for all other local authorities. Sunderland intends to explore the feasibility of becoming an approved provider through the NE6 consortia arrangements. This would allow us to offer accommodation to young people in other local authorities who cannot stay within their local area and maximise the use of the space in our children's homes. These arrangements could be for mainstream homes as well as for homes for children with disabilities.

## Adoption

The Department for Education (DfE) recently replaced the National Indicators relating to adoption and introduced two new indicators which focus on the "whole journey" and the "Family Finding" process. These details are set out below:

### **"The Whole Journey" - Average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (days)**

The average number of days between entering care and being placed for adoption remained stable in Sunderland at 687 days for 2011/12. The three year average for this measure was 694 days, an improvement on the 2010/11 three year average of 738 days. The DfE expects each local authority to have met the threshold of 639 days by the end of 2012/13.

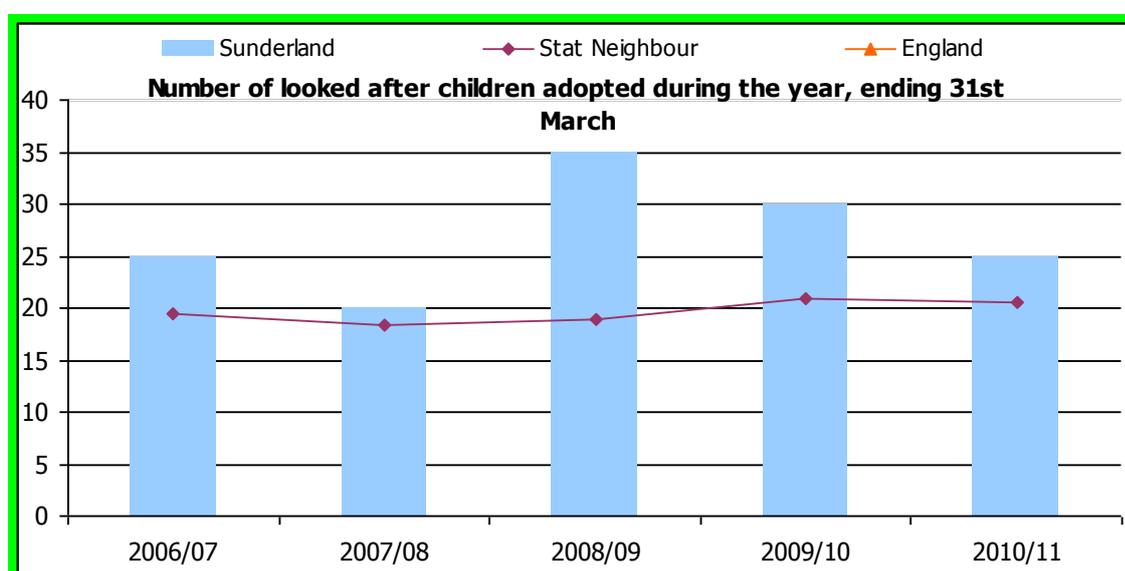
<b>Whole Journey Timescale (days)</b>		
	<b>In Year Avg</b>	<b>3 Year Avg</b>
2011/12	687	694
2010/11	685	738
2009/10	717	-
2008/09	789	-

The regional comparison for the 2010/11 scorecard shows that Sunderland had the longest "whole journey" in the region for the three years to that point. Sunderland was only one of two local authorities in the region not to have met the threshold.

Whole Journey - Distance from 639 day Threshold for 2008 – 2011	
	Distance from threshold
Hartlepool	-181
Redcar & Cleveland	-118
Gateshead	-111
Newcastle	-95
Middlesbrough	-87
North Tyneside	-78
Durham	-64
South Tyneside	-62
Northumberland	-41
Darlington	-23
Stockton	+4
Sunderland	+99

It is evident that Sunderland does need to make significant improvements in relation to “The Whole Journey”. However, Sunderland has a very positive attitude to adoption, and strives to try to find suitable placements for **all** children, and has had real success in placing older children and sibling groups, who are traditionally hard to place, and so can take longer to find families. Since April 2011, 42% of adoptions have been for children over the age of 5, with two children adopted after the age of 10. Whilst the figures in relation to timescale are not favourable for Sunderland, we will continue to find adoptive families for children of any age, regardless of the time that takes.

In the three year average of 2009-11 Sunderland was placed 8<sup>th</sup> in the national league table for the proportion of children who are adopted when they ceased to be looked after (21% over three years). For 2011/12, this increased to 27.4%. Based on a three year average this would represent a higher rate than any other local authority in England last year. This particularly pleasing when compared to national figures which show a decrease of 5% in the numbers of looked after children being adopted between 2010 and 2011, and of 8% from 2007 to 2011.



Going forward, the challenge for the Adoption Service is to continue to recruit adopters particularly in the current financial climate.

In addition to the good adoption outcomes achieved, there has been an increase in the proportion of children who are subject to a Placement Order. These types of Orders give a strong indication that the child will be placed for adoption and/or adopted in the near future. In the period 2008/09–2010/11 the proportion of children with a Placement Order was, on average 20%. In 2011 the rate has remained at or above 25%.

However, the DfE “**Family Finding**” indicator, which provides the average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days) remained relatively stable over the last four years, and there was a slight lengthening of the process in 2011/12.

The average number of days between the local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family has declined slightly in Sunderland at 236 days for 2011/12. The three year average for this measure was 237 days, a decline on the 2010/11 three year average of 226 days. The DfE expects each local authority to have met the threshold of 213 days by the end of 2012/13.

<b>Family Finding Timescale (days)</b>		
	In Year Avg	3 Year Avg
2011/12	235	237
2010/11	258	226
2009/10	217	-
2008/09	225	-

The 2008 – 2011 three year average of 226 days was only 13 days above the expected threshold, however the below table shows that most other local authorities in the region met and exceeded this threshold.

<b>Family Finding - Distance from 213 day Threshold for 2008 – 2011</b>	
LA	Distance from threshold
South Tyneside	-153
Gateshead	-138
Hartlepool	-128
Newcastle	-123
Northumberland	-95
Middlesbrough	-58
Durham	-56
North Tyneside	-44
Redcar & Cleveland	-29
Sunderland	+13
Stockton	+45
Darlington	-

To make improvements the council and its partners need to identify where there are potential blockages in the system and how these can be rectified. A number of areas have already been identified, including working with health services to design a process whereby looked after children who need an adoption medical quickly, in order to meet court timescales, can do so. In addition, A Family Finding Assistant will be in post from January 2013, who will work between services, birth families and potential adoptive families to ensure there are as few hold ups in the system as possible. Promoting linkages between waiting adopters and waiting children will also be strengthened.

## **WIDER OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IN SUNDERLAND**

### **7.4 HEALTH OUTCOMES**

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment found that:

- analysis of Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) data shows that 24% of LAC have higher than average mental health needs and 13% have borderline mental health needs
- 92.1% of LAC who have been looked after for one year or more attend their annual health review
- 77% of LAC referred to the Youth Drug and Alcohol Project (YDAP) completed treatment successfully
- 8% of female LAC and care leavers under the age of 20 became pregnant, higher than the national average.

To promote the general health and wellbeing of looked after children, Children's Services has invested £5,000 for those in residential homes for gym and swimming memberships. The council will consider how this can be rolled out.

In addition, a comprehensive health action plan has been developed from the findings of the joint inspection and is monitored by STPCT and Sunderland NHS Clinical Commissioning Group, who take over the statutory duties for safeguarding children from the PCT in April 2013.

### **OK2 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 to young people, practitioners and to the Placement and Resources Panel and the Adoption Panel. Health partners include consultant paediatricians and associate specialists from City Hospitals Sunderland and South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust for Community Health Services. An associate specialist provides clinical support advice and management in the area of contraception and sexual health issues.

The Designated Nurse for Looked after Children (DNLAC) coordinates initial and annual health assessments, collating information across agencies. Outcomes from the assessments are contained in a health care plan, which is used in planning and reviews. The service focuses on the specific needs of looked after children and has resulted in positive involvement of staff and carers. Any concerns identified by the

young person or carer can be immediately treated outside the regular health assessments and where necessary a fast track to specialist services secured.

During the joint Inspection in February 2012, arrangements within the Health Team were praised. However the importance of having a strategic medical lead for looked after children was stressed and a Designated Doctor for LAC has since been appointed. In reviewing the role of the designated LAC professionals, the responsibilities and competencies of the LAC designated doctor and nurse are being brought in line with Royal College guidance (*Intercollegiate Guidance for Looked After Professionals*, 2012) and the service specification is to be reviewed to ensure the strategic responsibilities for both roles are explicit.

Commissioning intentions regarding implementing the national tariffs for children placed out of area have also been developed. The Commissioners are currently making payment to some local authorities who have already implemented this tariff.

### **Mental Health Services**

The joint inspection also noted the recent re-commissioning of core CAMHS services and highlighted the importance of monitoring waiting times and ensuring that pathways are fully embedded. Work is already underway to implement these actions some of which are described below.

There are two separate but interlinked types of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in Sunderland. These are Community CAMHS (sometimes referred to as Tier 2 CAMHS), which is provided by the South Tyneside Foundation NHS Trust, and the Children and Young People's Service (CYPS) provided by North of Tyne and Wear (NTW) Mental Health NHS Trust, known as Tier 3 CAMHS (although the service spans Tiers 2 to 4).

The NTW Children and Young People's Service has been in place since 3 April 2012 and it inherited a significant list of young people awaiting services, some who had been waiting a considerable length of time. The Trust is committed to reducing this waiting list and ensuring that young people are seen in a timely manner. To do this it has:

- Increased capacity in the service through additional recruitment - there has been a 23% increase in staffing levels
- Improved throughput by providing more focused intervention with clearly defined goals from the outset of intervention, which also reduces "therapeutic drift" and promoting dependency
- Improved the proportion of clinical work, i.e. direct work with children and young people, in relation to non clinical work.

There is access to emergency 24/7 on call provision, and young people needing this service are seen within 72 hours. The service is still working towards its target of seeing those requiring routine care within 6 weeks, and prioritises them according to need, to ensure that those young people with the most urgent needs are seen most quickly.

Young people requiring a service from CYPS are identified using the health assessments and outcomes from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires. A

consultation clinic is now available from South of Tyne and Wear (SOTW) CYPS staff on a monthly basis to children's homes and twice monthly for foster carers and other professionals. These clinics are to discuss individual young people or general behaviour management programmes and have had a positive impact on children and the care offered to them. There is also a clear pathway to the Intensive Community Treatment Service in SOTW CYPS for those young people who self harm.

For those children and young people placed out of area, arrangements are in place to ensure that they receive timely health assessments to determine their needs. SOTW CYPS are involved in planning specialist placements where CAMHS input is required.

In addition, designated professionals for looked after children and the SOTW CYPS are actively involved in the training of foster carers and residential care staff on the health needs of looked after children.

### **Substance Misuse**

During the year ended 31 March 2012, 24 young people were identified as having a substance misuse problem, 9.0% of all children looked after for 12 months or more. The young people ranged in age from 13 to 17. This is inline with 9.1% in 2010/11 where 26 young people were identified as having a substance misuse problem. Seven young people in the 2011/12 cohort were also identified in the 2010/11 cohort as having a substance misuse problem.

All young people identified with a substance misuse problem were offered an intervention, in line with 2011. There was an improvement in the number of young people who received an intervention, 95.8% compared to 61.5% in 2011. One young person was offered an intervention but refused it during the year.

### **Teenage pregnancies – care leavers**

<b>Year</b>	<b>No of care leavers becoming pregnant</b>
08/09	6
09/10	11
10/11	9
11/12	15

Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust is currently developing a Sexual Health Strategy, which will set out measures for improving teenage pregnancies, including for young women in the looked after system. The MALAP will contribute to the development of the strategy and will periodic progress reports.

### **7.5 EDUCATION**

Sunderland has had a Virtual Headteacher with responsibility for the education of looked after children since 2008. All schools in Sunderland have had a 'Designated Teacher for Looked After Children' since 2000. In 2010, the Looked After Children in Education provision was transformed into Sunderland Virtual School (SVS). The 'Virtual School' comprises the Headteacher, three part-time teachers, an Inclusion

Officer and an Assistant Inclusion Officer, who advise and support schools and Designated Teachers, carers, social workers and other partners working to promote educational attainment and achievement of looked after children. The Ofsted inspection in 2012 judged SVS under the section of 'Enjoy and Achieve' to be 'Good' and its capacity to improve as 'Good'.

The majority of looked after children have a personal education plans (PEPs), though the Ofsted inspection identified that the quality of these is inconsistent, and not all plans have clear goals and not all explain how expected outcomes will be achieved. In response to this, Sunderland Virtual School has implemented rigorous strategies including a new PEP proforma, Guidance on Completion of PEPs, and individual training tutorial sessions for all Designated Teachers and social workers.

The Virtual Headteacher has rigorous oversight of the achievement of children and young people who are looked after. There are good processes which track and monitor the progress of individual children on a termly basis. The information is used to identify, with the designated teacher, a range of interventions and support in order to improve attainment, all of which highlight the importance of targeted support to individual children and small groups of young people.

## Educational Attainment of Looked After Children

### Looked After Children: Key Stage 1 Results 2012

Academic Year	Cohort Size	Level			Statemented
		2+ Reading	Level 2+ Writing	Level 2+ Maths	
2012	9	78%	56%	67%	11%
2011	7	86%	71%	86%	0%
2010	12	58%	50%	50%	17%
2009	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2008	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Key Stage 1 results for LAC have:

- declined from 86% to 78%, 2011 to 2012 but show upward 3 year trend in reading
- declined from 71% to 56%, 2011 to 2012 but show upward 3 year trend in writing
- declined from 86% to 67%, 2011 to 2012 but show upward 3 year trend in maths

### Looked After Children: Key Stage 2 Results 2012

Academic Year	Cohort Size	Level 4+			Statemented
		Eng & Maths	Level 4+ English	Level 4+ Maths	
2012	11	36%	36%	36%	27%
2011	12	17%	42%	25%	17%
2010	13	64%	64%	64%	15%
2009	19	42%	42%	47%	n/a
2008	12	83%	79%	93%	n/a

Key Stage 2 results for LAC have:

- improved from 17% to 36% 2011 to 2012 for level; 4+ in both English and Maths; results fluctuate over last 5 years
- reduced from 42% to 36% in level 4 English 2011 - 2012, declining over last 3 years
- improved from 25% to 36% in maths 2011 - 2012, fluctuating over last 5 years

### Looked After Children: Key Stage 4 Results 2012

Academic Year	Cohort Size	5+ A*-C (incl Eng&Maths)	Pupil Context:					
			5+ A*-C	5+ A*-G	1+ A*-G	State-mented	School Action/ SA Plus	Overall SEN
2012	33	12%	48%	79%	82%	36%	42%	78%
2011	31	7%	36%	52%	71%	35%	35%	70%
2010	31	7%	42%	65%	94%	32%	48%	80%
2009	40	11%	26%	n/a	90%	n/a	n/a	n/a
2008	30	6%	19%	n/a	75%	n/a	n/a	n/a

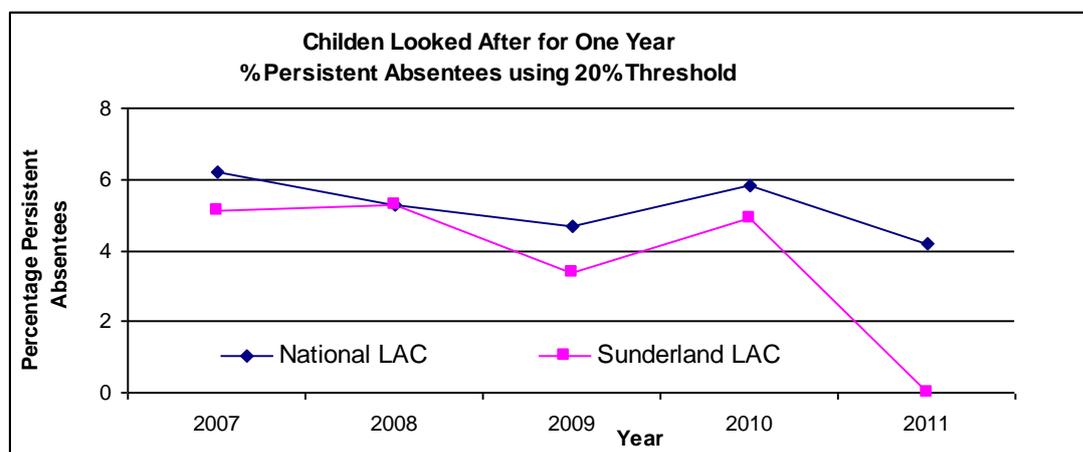
Key Stage 4 results for LAC have improved in 2012:

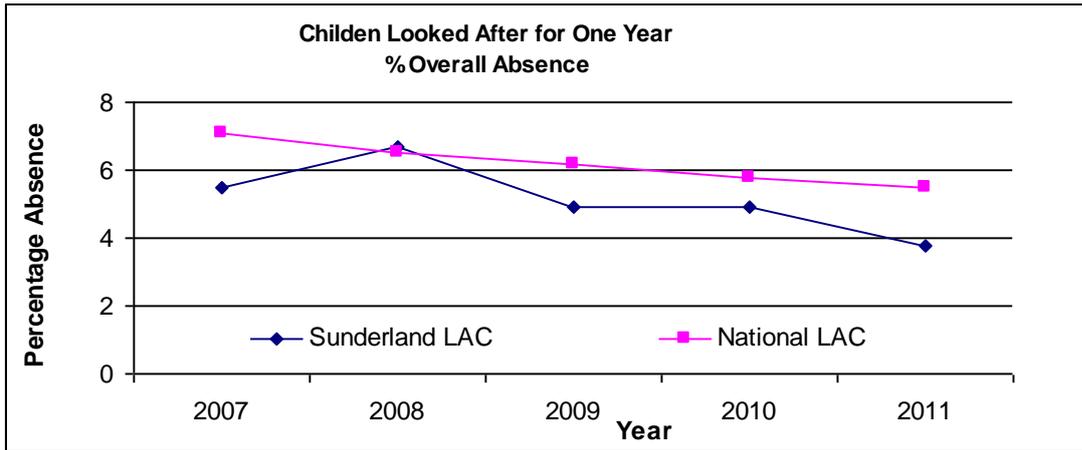
- % achieving 5+A\*-C including English and maths has improved from 7% to 12% which is in line with 2011 national results of 13% (2012 not yet published)
- % achieving 5+A\*-C grades has improved from 36% to 48% and 5+A\*-G grades from 52% to 79%. 82% achieved at least 1 GCSE pass.

These results are in context of an increase in the proportion of the cohort who have SEN, where 36% of cohort are statemented and 42% are at School Action / School Action Plus.

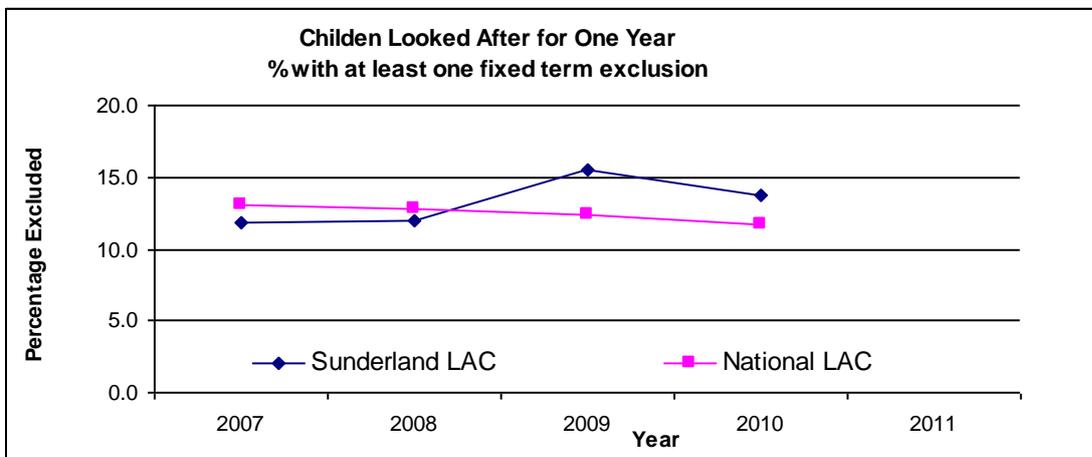
- National comparisons for 2012 are not yet available, but in 2011, the gap between Sunderland's results and the national average in relation to 5+A\*-C GCSE was significant at 7% and 13% respectively.

### Attendance





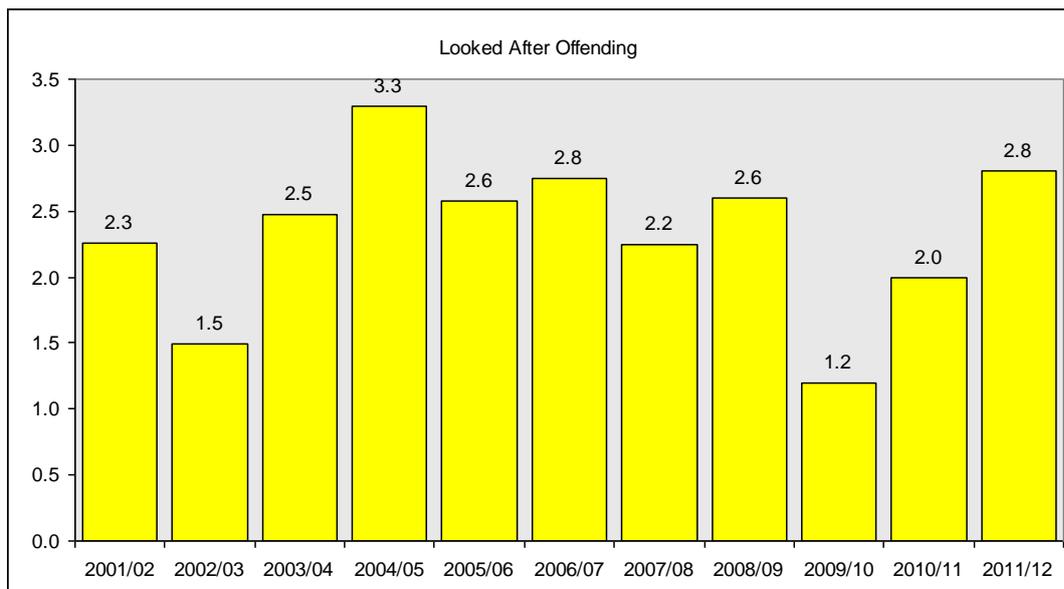
### Fixed Term Exclusions



### 7.6 OFFENDING

At the end of March 2012 the offending ratio for children aged 10 and over who have been looked after for 12 months or more was 2.8. This equates to 27 young people receiving substantive outcomes between April 2011 and March 2012 from a cohort of 168 (16.1%). The percentage is expressed as a ratio to the Northumbria offending figure of 5.66% for the same age group. This is an increase in offending behaviour compared to 2010/11 when 20 young people received substantive outcomes (11.2% of the cohort) and the offending ratio to Northumbria was 2.0.

The trend of all children looked after who offend, since 2001, has varied significantly over the years. There was a significant reduction in 2009/10, but it has increased since that date.



It is difficult to pinpoint any one reason for this variation, but the figures need to be taken in the context that the cohort measures any young person who commits an offence in the period and does not look at a more sophisticated analysis of whether a young person's offending reduces or increases in seriousness and frequency once they enter the Looked After system.

An analysis was previously undertaken of the offending careers of all Looked After Children to test the hypothesis that coming into care criminalises children. In the eight years from 2003 to 2011, 931 children became looked after. Because of the time delay between committing an offence and conviction, it is difficult to give entirely accurate figures, but the best estimate is that, of those children who had been convicted, 28% committed the offence after coming into care whilst 72% had an offending history before becoming looked after. Moreover, we know that one of the common contributory factors for children coming into care is chaotic or anti-social behaviour which may not have resulted in criminal charges (e.g. if the child is under 10 years of age), so the precursors for offending behaviour are often already present prior to admission. There is also some anecdotal evidence that becoming looked after can be a protective factor for some young people, i.e. some children who were prolific offenders actually reduce their offending rate once they become looked after.

Moreover an analysis of re-offending within the Youth Offending Service is that, as the overall number of offenders decreases year on year, a reduced but more challenging cohort remains in the offending population who tend to commit a higher number of re-offences and subsequently increasing the proportion of offenders reoffending which makes for a challenging target for offending rates by Looked After Children.

## 7.7 SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

At a national level, the Department of Education issued a Sexual Exploitation Action Plan in November 2011, in response to the Barnados report 'Puppet on a String: The urgent need to cut children free from sexual exploitation' (published in January 2011). In addition, the verdict in the Rochdale child sexual exploitation case in May 2012 and the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) Inquiry into Child Sexual

Exploitation in Gangs and Groups, both highlighted the issue of sexual exploitation and particularly regarding children and young people in care.

Since then the Government has announced urgent reforms to protect children in residential care homes from sexual exploitation and to overhaul the wider system. The measures include more robust checks before children are placed in homes outside of their home area; overhauling the quality and transparency of data; and reviewing all aspects of the quality and effectiveness of children's homes. An interim report will be published in September 2012 and a final report in Autumn 2013 by the OCC.

Locally, a Switch Project Officer was appointed in February 2012, for a 12 month period, to work across agencies to support the development of preventative services for children and young people at risk of going missing and of sexual exploitation. Shared intelligence, operational and strategic groups have also been developed and are meeting regularly, reporting to the Sunderland Safeguarding Children Board and the Safer Sunderland Partnership.

There have been changes to the Children's Case Management information system to enable the recording of sexual exploitation concerns. Analysis of the data that has been recorded has highlighted a gap in recording for looked after children and care leavers. However, information has been shared at the Shared Intelligence where there are concerns about young people in these groups.

Nine young people were identified during the Shared Intelligence meetings, three Looked After Children (one female aged 13 and two males aged 15) and six Care Leavers (all female aged 16 – 20). All the LAC discussed currently live in residential placements, one of which is outside of Sunderland. The three Care Leavers are living independently, two in supported accommodation and one is living temporarily with friends.

There is a strong link between children being sexually exploited and children going missing from home or care. Some 140,000 children go missing from home or care each year and it has been estimated that running away places around a quarter of these young people at risk of serious harm. There are particular concerns about the links to children running away and the risks of their exposure to sexual exploitation.

Of the 39 children and young people where sexual exploitation concerns were recorded, 10% had also had a missing episode in the same time period. Of the LAC and Care Leavers who are under 18, 80% also had missing episodes in the same time period.

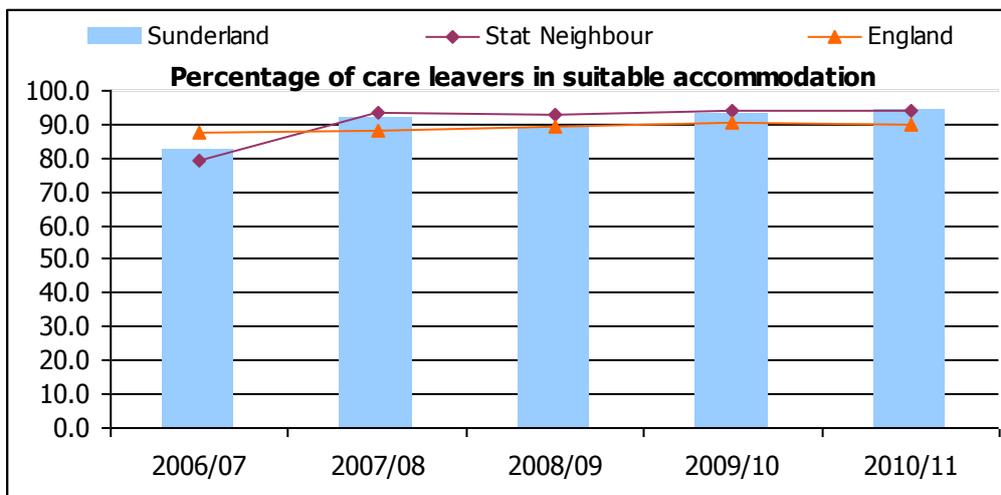
There is a need to raise the importance to staff of early flagging where concerns of sexual exploitation exist, to support prevention and early intervention and to identify trends in patterns of activity is also recognised and will be incorporated.

At the time of writing the strategy, Children's Services was in discussion with the Children's Society to bid for funding via the Northern Rock Foundation for a dedicated worker to complete direct work with young people at risk of sexual exploitation, as well as undertake training for professionals to be able to identify the signs when a young person is being exploited.

## 7.8 CARE LEAVERS

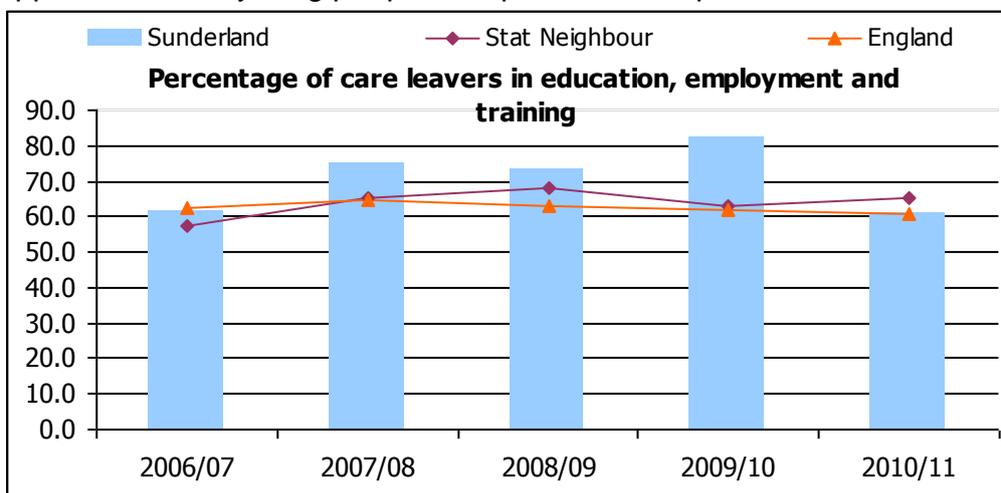
The Leaving Care Service supports young people until the age of 21 and up to the age of 25 in accessing higher education. The Service works with approximately 200 young people at any one time and is staffed by social workers and support staff who are experienced in meeting the needs of young people.

The proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation continues to improve year on year, reaching 98% at 2011/12, exceeding 86% target. Department for Education published three year average data for this indicator in 2011/12, which showed that at 92%, Sunderland was above the national average 90%. Sunderland was also placed 68<sup>th</sup> out of 152.



### Care leavers in Employment, Education or Training (EET)

Historically, Sunderland has high performance of care leavers in EET, being consistently above statistical neighbours and national averages. However, there was a significant drop in 2010/11 and this can be associated with two factors. One is that this was a small, but particularly challenging cohort, and non-engagement from just a few young people has a significant impact on the figures. The other is the challenging economic conditions the city is currently facing, both in terms of opportunities for young people and pressures on public service resources.



Despite this, multi-agency working across the city has helped to:

- maintain links with Connexions to support care leavers with career pathways
- develop Post-16 Education Pathways
- secure work experience and apprenticeships for care leavers
- increase the number of care leavers accessing further and higher education.

### **Care leavers in higher education**

A lot of work has been done in order to raise the aspirations of care leavers to support them to consider further and higher education as an option, outlined below:

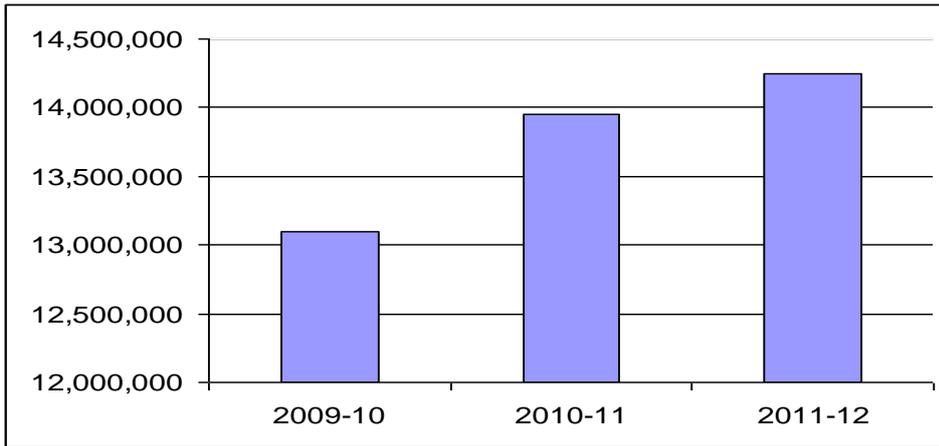
- Worked with Sunderland University on the Choices Programme
- Identified a generous package of financial support for care leavers at university in line with the Buttle Trust recommendations
- Worked with foster carers to aspirations for care leavers
- Identified a worker to support staff who were working with care leavers who potentially wanted to access university, with the application process and financial procedures
- Raising aspirations residential for care leavers whose aim was to access university
- Supported graduates to promote the possibility of accessing university to professionals and care leavers
- Changed the financial policy to include paying foster carers the full fostering allowance for care leavers over the age of 18 who were undertaking A' Level or equivalent courses.

As a result, there has been an increase year on year of care leavers accessing university, and the Leaving Care Service currently supports 10 young people at University. It is anticipated that a further 5 care leavers will enrol at university in the academic year 2012/13. Once care leaver has successfully completed the post graduate Legal Practitioners course.

## **7.9 RESOURCES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN SERVICES**

Sunderland's total Looked After Children (LAC) budget has increased over the last three years due to investment in LAC services, mainly in Sunderland's fostering scheme.

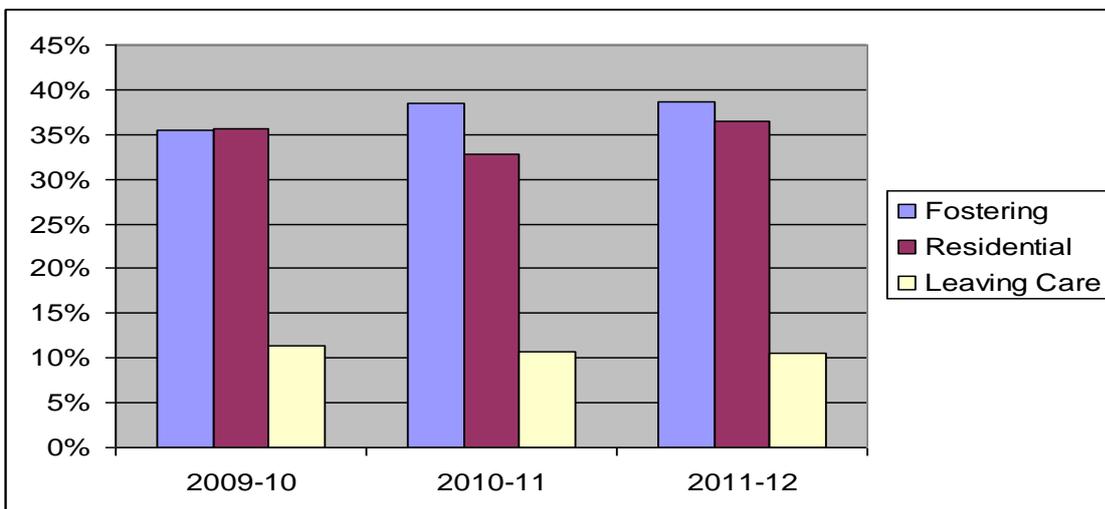
Between 2009-10 and 2011-12 there has been an increase of £1.153 million in the budget for LAC services.



Source – Budget data from 2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12 Department of Education Section 251 returns

In 2011-12, Sunderland spent 24% (£3.38m) of its £14.25m budget for services for looked after children, on external organisations. At the end of March 2012, 11% of Sunderland’s fostering placements were externally commissioned and 33% of its residential placements were externally commissioned. As part of the Budget Planning Framework 2011-15, £1.650 million was secured to provide a permanent solution to the budget challenges around external placements.

In 2009-10 the percentage of budget allocated to fostering and residential services was the same (36% fostering services, 36% residential services). However, in 2010-11 and 2011-12, Sunderland has been able to allocate a greater percentage of its LAC budget to fostering services rather than residential services. This is as a direct result of the closure of one children’s home and reinvesting that money into the recruitment and retention of foster carers, linked to the Looked After Children Placement and Foster Care Recruitment Strategies.



Source – Budget data from 2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12 Department of Education Section 251 returns