

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 FEBRUARY 2010

CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL REPORT 2000-2010

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Strategic Priorities: Safe City, Learning City

1 WHY HAS THIS REPORT COME TO THE COMMITTEE?

- 1.1 To inform Members of the current position of the Council as a 'Corporate Parent', and to ensure that as Corporate Parents Members are aware Members are aware of the current performance of the Council in meeting this responsibility. The report also updates Members about services and initiatives in place and under development to further improve outcomes for those children and young people for whom the council has parenting responsibility.

2. BACKGROUND

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

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

- 2.2 In 2007, in response to continuing concern about the persistent gap in outcomes between children in care and their peers, the Government published the paper, 'Care Matters: Time for Change', requiring each local authority to re-examine and re-invigorate the way it meets the needs of children in care. The key elements of the paper have found expression in the Children and Young Persons' Act 2008.

2.3 Corporate Parenting

For most children, parents hold together the many strands of their lives, and maintain the knowledge of the child's history, circumstances and development. Access to professional services (for example, GP and other health services and education) and leisure, recreation and cultural activity is managed by the parent. Good parents keep abreast of their child's progress and tailor their support and advocacy according to their own aspirations for the child and their understanding of his or her needs. As their children grow and develop, good parents listen to their views and encourage their aspirations. It is the good parent who manages the services the child receives, not the agency or professional providing that service, and the securely attached child is not disadvantaged by changes in personnel in the agencies providing services.

- 2.4 When a child becomes looked after, he or she enters a system in which their care and upbringing is managed by professionals and paid carers. This has two major consequences for the child. Firstly, in addition to the problems of needing to re-form attachments, he/she moves into a world of paid, and sometimes changing, carers, where life is managed through formal and legal processes. Secondly, in addition to learning to cope with this world, they have lost the continuity of parental management of their access to services and opportunities.
- 2.5 For 'Corporate Parenting' to replicate the quality of care afforded by a 'good parent', each agency and professional involved needs to consider how they can be proactive, within their own remit, on behalf of looked after children, and for all agencies to strive for ever stronger collaborative working so that the whole of the 'corporate parent' can be greater than the sum of its parts.
- 2.6 The Corporate Parenting responsibility is shared by the Council as a whole. All Members, not just those with an interest in Children's Services, are 'Corporate Parents'.

3. THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

- 3.1 The Council Constitution was revised in July 2005 and included provision in its 'Responsibility for Functions' for a Corporate Parenting Board to be established. Part 3 of the constitution states the terms of reference of the Board to be an advisory role to the Council, and that ".it shall:
- Oversee the exercise of the Council's responsibilities as Corporate Parent and ensure that the interests of Looked After Children are appropriately reflected in all Council policies and the work of the Children's Trust
 - Inspect Children's Homes and make and consider reports on such visits."
- 3.2 The Corporate Parenting Board first met in September 2006 and has met quarterly since that date. At the first meeting the terms of reference were confirmed as set out in the Council Constitution and it was further agreed that the Board would report to the Children's Trust
- 3.3 A report was submitted to the Review Committee in February 2009 describing the role of the Board and its work since it was established up to December 2008.
- 3.4. The Corporate Parenting Board continues to meet quarterly and in the past year has received reports concerning:
- Children's Services quarterly performance.
 - Children who go missing from Care
 - Independent Advocacy for children and young people
 - Housing and accommodation issues for Care Leavers
 - Report from the Change Council regarding the work looked after young people are undertaking to help improve services and represent young people in care
 - Safeguarding Inspection Arrangements.
 - Health needs of Looked After Children
 - Security Arrangements in Children's Homes

3.5 Some Members of the Corporate Parenting Board have identified themselves as available to undertake 'Regulation 33' monitoring visits to our Children's Homes.

3.6 Whilst all portfolio holders are represented on the Board, officer involvement is predominantly from Children's Services.

4. MEMBER TRAINING

4.1 In 2009 Training was introduced for Members in relation to Corporate Parenting. This has now been incorporated into the Members' Training programme and covers two main areas:

- Awareness raising for Members about Corporate Parenting. This is partly presented by young people alongside officers involved in Services for Looked after Children. Education and Health. The course has been well received, with one member describing it as 'The best seminar I have attended in over 20 years on the Council'
- Specialist training for those Members who have opted to participate in 'Regulation 33' visits to monitor standards in Children's Homes

4.2 All Members have been issued with a handbook, "Putting Corporate Parenting Into Practice: Understanding the Councillor's Role", produced on behalf of the DCSF by the National Children's Bureau.

5. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

5.1 Within Sunderland the number of Looked After Children has been stable. At the end of December 2009 there were 386 Looked After Children and Young People, representing 66.4 per 10,000 of children under the age of 18 years.

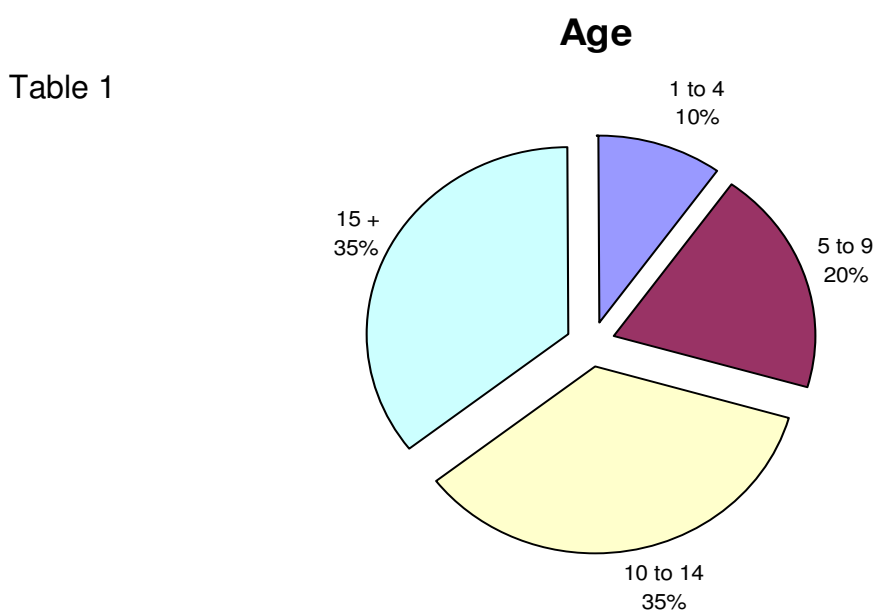
5.2 Profile of the Looked After Population - While the numbers of Looked after Children remains stable, it is important to recognize that this is an ever-changing population. Most children who come into the system return to their own families, or leave the system by being adopted or made subject to Special Guardianship Orders. (see Section 14.2 below)

5.3 In the 12 months to the end of December 2009, 149 children and young people came into care and 151 left, 7 more boys leaving than girls. Annually a number of young people over the age of 16 years require the support of the 'Leaving Care Service'. This varies year on year between approximately 20 and 40 but averages around 30 young people.

5.4 It is important to recognise that this turnover means that a much higher number of children are affected by being in the care system than the population at any one time may suggest. Far from affecting only the 386 children under 18 currently in the system, the turnover indicates that of all children under the age of 18 in Sunderland today, around 2,500 will at some time in their lives experience

periods in care, or have already been in care, or are currently in care.

- 5.5 Measurement of the Council's performance in relation to looked after children and young people is primarily based upon outcomes for those who have been looked after for at least 12 months as at the end of each September, known as the 'OC2 Cohort'. The number at the end of September 2009 was 282. This represents a steady reduction over the years, from 315 in 2008 and 329 in 2007
- 5.6 Of the 282 young people in this year's cohort, 78.7% were of school age. The largest growth in population of the OC2 cohort over the last few years has been amongst the 10 to 14 and 15+ age groups. which make up 70% of the September 2009 OC2 cohort



Age Distribution of LAC Cohort for OC2 2009
68.7% are boys and 38.5% are girls.

6. CARE ARRANGEMENTS

6.1 Family Placements

- 6.1.1 All children under the age of 10 years are in Family Placements. Of 157 Children aged 10 to 15 years, 128 are in family placements. This level of family placements is stable and is just one percentage point below the target of 83%
- 6.1.2 There are 291 children in Foster Care. This includes a number of children who are placed with friends or relatives who have been assessed as carers
- 6.1.3 26 Children are currently placed for adoption
- 6.1.4 13 Children subject to Care Orders are placed with a parent under the 'Placement With Parents etc'. Regulations 1991

6.2 Residential Care

- 6.2.1 There are 48 children and young people, all over the age of 10 years, in residential care. This does not include young people with disabilities who receive short break residential care
- 6.2.2 There are six Children's Homes in Sunderland, five of which provide full-time care for up to seven children per home. A small number of children are placed outside Sunderland in specialist residential placements.
- 6.2.3 In addition, Sunderland provides a short-break care facility for children with additional needs which is consistently graded as outstanding.

7. PLACEMENT STABILITY

- 7.1 Stability is associated with better outcomes. Placement breakdown has a significant impact on children's well being and their friendships and continuity of access to other key services.
- 7.2 In the period until the end of December 2010, 32 children experienced three or more placement moves. Where instances of young people going 'missing' are included in the data, this figure rises to 36 but is still below the target of no more than 10.5% of children in care experiencing such changes. Note that the third 'move' for some children is the move to a permanent family and represents a positive step towards permanence and stability.
- 7.3 Of 155 children under 16 and looked after for at least 2.5 years, 104 have been in the same placement for at least two years. (67.1%, below the target of 74%) and remains an area for improvement. Whilst this group will include some of the most settled children it will also include a number of the most challenging.
- 7.4 In order to improve placement stability, placement choice and flexibility, as well as to reduce expenditure on external placements, the Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention Strategy was implemented in June 2009. This involved a significant increase in resources (£475k per annum in 2009/10 with an additional £140k per annum thereafter) which has enabled Sunderland to increase foster carer allowances to nationally recommended levels and provide sufficient budget for 8 additional foster care workers (fee paid carers) in 2009/10 and a further 7 in 2010/11

8. HEALTH PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

- 8.1 The Health of Looked After Children is measured as an average of the percentage receiving an annual health check, and the percentage having a dental check in the preceding 12 months.
- 8.2 At the end of September 2009, 87.2% of our children had an annual health check, a slight reduction on previous years possibly related to the older profile of the

population (older children and young people can be less inclined to accept routine 'medical's') and 92.1% had their teeth checked by a dentist, a rise of 3% on the previous year.

- 8.3 The average of these figures (91%) is consistent with our trend over the past eight years has placed Sunderland on a par with it's statistical neighbours and slightly ahead of the national average.

8.4 Immunisations

- 8.4.1 From the information provided, 92.9% of children looked after had their immunisations up-to-date at 30 September 2009; this had increased by 4% in comparison with last year. This includes immunisations due before admittance into care and during time spent in care. Where children did not receive immunisations for health reasons or because parents refused consent, these were counted as children whose immunisations were not up-to-date.
- 8.4.2 All 33 (100%) children looked after aged under 5 had their development assessments up-to date at 30 September 2009. This was higher than last years figure of 94.4%.

9. EDUCATION PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

- 9.1 Education outcomes performance is measured in relation to children who have been in care for at least 12 months as at the end of September. In 2009 this covered 282 children of whom 226 were of school age.
- 9.2 Attainment for key Stage 1 has improved in reading however Key stage 2 shows a slight decline compared to the previous year. Educational attainments at GCSE/GNVQ stage have also improved in all categories since last year.

9.3 Key Stage 1

The attainment of looked after children at Key Stage 1 has steadily increased from 2001 to 2005 in reading, writing and mathematics. However from 2006 to 2008 performance had declined in all three areas, this year shows the first signs of improvement since 2005 in reading, showing a 31.3 percentage point increase in comparison to 2008. There were 14 children in this group. The Letterbox Scheme (see 18.2.5. below) has had a positive impact here.

Table 2

	2008	2009
	% achieving Level 4 or above	% achieving Level 4 or above
English	78.5%	42.1%
Maths	98.8%	47.4%
Science	85.7%	68.4%

- 9.4 There were 19 looked after children eligible to sit Key Stage 2, of whom 13 (68.4%) sat all Key Stage 2 tests.
The attainment of looked after children in Sunderland at Key Stage 2 has declined in all 3 areas (English, Maths and Science). The below table shows the percentage of looked after children in Sunderland achieving level 4 or above in English, Maths and Science.

Table 3

	2008	2009
	% achieving Level 4 or above	% achieving Level 4 or above
English	78.5%	42.1%
Maths	98.8%	47.4%
Science	85.7%	68.4%

- 9.5 **Key Stage 4: GCSEs and GNVQs**
- 9.5.1 There were 39 looked after children eligible to sit GCSE / GNVQs in 2009, and 31 (79.4%) of these children sat at least one GCSE / GNVQ examination.
- 9.5.2 The number of children obtaining 1 to 5 A*-G remains the same as 2008 however the percentage shows a slight decline from 53.1% in 2008 to 43.5% in 2009.
- 9.5.3 There were 7 children obtaining 1 to 5 A*-C this year in comparison to 6 children in 2008, however; again the percentages show a slight decline as this years GCSE cohort was higher than 2008.
- 9.5.4 However, this apparent decline is offset by changes in the way attainment at Key Stage 4 is measured, and an additional set of indicators has been introduced to include other GCSE-equivalent qualifications, including entry-level examinations
- 9.5.5 The figures below indicate that all our children passed at least one examination, 68% passed at least 5 GCSEs, with 28.5% achieving at least 5 GCSEs at A*-C grades. This places Sunderland consistently above the national average for Looked After Children. Where English and Mathematics are included in the A*-C grades, our performance drops to 11.4%. However this cannot be compared to previous years' performance which did not include this measure, and Members are reminded that there has been a steady improvement in GCSE attainment for looked after children since 2001, when only 8% of the cohort attained 5 A*-C grades without the inclusion of Maths and English

Table 4

Attainment Level	Number of children
Number in year 11 at school attempting any qualification at GCSE or equivalent (including entry level qualifications)	35 (100%)
Of these:	
- the number who obtained any qualification at GCSE	35 (100%)

- or equivalent (including entry level qualifications)
- the number who obtained at least 5 A* to G grades at GCSE or equivalent 24 (68.5%)
- the number who obtained at least 5 A* to C grades at GCSE or equivalent 10 (28.5%)
- the number who obtained at least 5 A* to C grades including English and mathematics at GCSE or equivalent 4 (11.75%)

9.6 School Attendance

- 9.6.1 Attendance of looked after children has been of concern. Unlike attendance data for other children this is measured as the proportion of looked after children who miss 25 or more days of school for any reason.
- 9.6.2 This can include time off for medical or psychological appointments, meetings, family contact, holiday, periods of missed education due to school changes as well as illness, absenteeism, truancy or exclusion.
- 9.6.3 The number of children missing 25 or more days of school decreased significantly in 2008-9 to 24 (10.6%) in comparison to 38 children (16%) in 2007-8.
- 9.6.4 This is particularly noteworthy against the background that the 10-14 and 15+ age groups which in the wider population show greater disengagement, are the largest age group in the current looked after population, and it has long been recognised that particularly for older children coming into care, patterns of non-attendance can already be established before the child enters care.
- 9.6.5 The majority of our looked after children attend school regularly, and more have 100% attendance than miss 25 or more days.
- 9.6.6 As well as Placement Stability, we have recognized the importance of stability in school. In the year ending December 31st, 2009 only two children moved school as a result of a placement move.
- 9.6.7 None of the cohort were subject to permanent exclusions from school
- 9.6.8 There has also been a continued reduction of the percentage of children in care being subject to the Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs, (SEN) falling from 23.6% in 2007 to 15.6% in 2009. It is not possible to determine whether this is a change in the demography or is as a result of changes in practice for SEN.

10. LEISURE AND RECREATION

Sunderland continues to participate in the regional MAX Card scheme which enables many families and young people to participate in more frequent outings to cultural venues at a reduced or no charge. Over the last year 1100 MAX Cards have been distributed to looked after children and young people and their carers. At a very successful event held at Beamish in October 09 the use of the card was

evaluated with MAX card users indicating which locations they preferred to visit, the overwhelming leader was Alnwick Gardens, 82% of people enjoyed their visit with 80% saying they wouldn't have visited venues without the MAX card.

Each Childrens Home has an activity coordinator responsible for ensuring that all the young people are offered a varied programme of activities. Each home has a least one staff member who is 'Evolve' trained to approve external visits.

11. MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION

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

11.2 Offending

11.2.1 In the offending section of the OC2 return performance is measured as the percentage of children aged 10 or over who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months, who were given a final warning/reprimand or convicted during the year for an offence committed whilst they were looked after, expressed as a ratio of the percentage of all children aged 10 or over given a final warning/reprimand or convicted for an offence in the police force area. This year's ratio has gone down from 3.1 to 1.9 exceeding the PAF C18 target of 2.4.

11.2.2 Performance has improved from 21.3% of looked after children offending in 2007-8 reducing to 14.6% in 2008-9.

12. LOOKED AFTER REVIEWS PERFORMANCE.

12.1 The Local Authority is required to regularly review the care of Looked After Children. These reviews must take place at minimum statutory intervals: The first review must be no more than 28 days after a child enters the system, the second after no more than three months from the first, and thereafter at minimum intervals not exceeding six months. The timeliness of their reviews is a Performance Indicator for the council.

12.2 In the rolling year to the end of December 96.5% (338/354) of looked after children had all of their reviews in timescale. This is in the top banding for National Indicators.

12.3 The reviews are undertaken by a team of Independent Reviewing Officers working within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit. In 2009 the team was increased from five to six officers. These Independent Reviewing Officers also currently undertake the function of Independent Chairperson for Child Protection Conferences and Reviews, and whilst there has not been an increase in the number of looked after children as some authorities have experienced following the Haringey Inquiry, there has been a substantial increase in the number of children subject to protection plans in Sunderland

- 12.3 Local Authority Performance is also measured in relation to fulfilling the statutory duty to consider the wishes and feelings of each child and taking these into account when making decisions. This is measured as a percentage of children aged 5 or over who 'participate' in their Looked After Reviews. Around 50% of the children are actually present at their own reviews, with others contributing in writing, or indirectly by having their views represented by a third party.
- 12.4 The DCSF 'participation' definition is wide enough to enable us to record our current performance in this area at 100%. However we are concerned to improve the level and quality of direct participation, and in January 2010 appointed two part-time staff dedicated to visiting children in foster care to assist the children prepare contributions to their reviews. (see New Developments: Viewpoint at section 18.1 below)

13. STANDARDS MONITORING (REGULATION 33 AND OFSTED INSPECTIONS)

- 13.1 Unannounced visits to children's homes under Regulation 33 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2001 are carried out monthly by officers from the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit. They consistently report high quality of care in all the homes
- 13.2 Ofsted inspects children's homes twice per year, one full inspection and one partial (both unannounced). Currently, two of the homes are judged "good" and four "satisfactory". The short break unit for disabled children is judged "outstanding"
- 13.3 Members have the opportunity to participate in the Regulation 33 Monitoring Visits. The rota list for monitoring visits has 11 identified members of whom five have taken part in visits over the past year. A further recruitment and training programme is commencing in February 2010 to identify Members to add to this rota and to replace those Members who may not be in a position to maintain their current involvement.

14. PLACEMENT OUTCOMES:

14.1 Return to Family

Most children who come into the Care system return to their families of origin. Some do so within a very short period, but most within approximately 2 years, depending on the time taken to work with the families to address issues of risk and parenting

14.2 Adoption and Special Guardianship

- 14.2.1 The percentage of children adopted who were placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision to place improved from 68 at the end of March to 76 % (19/25) in the period since the beginning of the financial year. This is in context of 25 children adopted since the beginning of the year. In the 12 month period the figure is 79.6%

- 14.2.2 In the period since April –October 2010 there were 25 children adopted and 8 children had a Special Guardianship Order, This represents 10.2% of those in care over the 6 month period against a target of 8.7% for the year.
- 14.2.3 In the preceding twelve months there were 39 children adopted and 8 children had a Special Guardianship Order, in total representing 14.6% of those in care over 6 months.
- 14.2.4 Currently 26 children, 24 of whom are under 10 are placed for adoption and awaiting the decision of the court.

15. LEAVING CARE:

- 15.1 Within England at the end of March 2009 there is an increase in the number of children whom local authorities are in contact with after they leave care. The number with whom they are not in contact has fallen from 11 per cent to 6 per cent over the past five years. One third of care leavers are not in education, employment or training by the age of 19. Just over ten per cent of care leavers are still being housed in unsuitable accommodation after leaving care, according to Government definitions of what is suitable.
- 15.2 In Sunderland a relative minority of children in the Care System remain until they are over 16 years and move on with support from the Leaving Care Service. On average around 30 young people annually require dedicated support to make the transition to adulthood and independence

The Service works with young people from the start of Year 11 until their 21st birthday (24 if they are in full time higher education). The Service holds statutory responsibility for these young people and ensures they have clear pathways in place to address their needs in relation to accommodation, education, training and employment and personal support. The Service works with approximately 180 young people at anyone time and is staffed by social workers and support staff who are experienced in meeting the needs of young people.

- 15.3 Each year a small number of severely disabled young people in care reach their 18th birthday and require support from Health Housing and Adult Services into adulthood. In July 2009 the Futures Team was established in HHAS and jointly funded by Children's Services to undertake person centred planning with all severely disabled young people likely to need ongoing support.

Priority is given to young people for whom the Council is a corporate parent and this is already resulting in more individually tailored and community based arrangements for young people as they enter adulthood.

In 2009, 14 out of 15 young people who left care were still in contact with the Leaving Care Service around their 19th birthday

The Leaving Care Service supports young people until the age of 21 years in line with the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. For those young people who are accessing higher education the Service remains involved until the young person reaches 24 years or until they complete their course.

15.3 Appropriate Accommodation for Care Leavers

In 2009 93% (14 out of 15) of care leavers were in suitable accommodation, against a target of 86%. Accommodation for Care leavers has been subject of a recent presentation to the Corporate Parenting Board, and Sunderland has access to a range of provision

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

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

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

15.4 Employment of Care Leavers

Within Sunderland at the end of November those in employment, education or training has risen to 80 % (12/15), against a target of 62%. There remains a need to develop more options for training and employment (See Section 19.2 below)

15.5 Higher/Further education

The Leaving Care Service currently supports 6 young people at University. The Service provides financial support of £6640 a year which ensures that the young person's fees and accommodation are paid for. Feedback from those of our young people who have succeed in gaining university places indicates they feel well supported, at a level comparable to their peers who receive parental support.

15.6 Education Training and Employment

The Unlocking Potential Scheme works with care leavers in relation to the Education, Training and Employment. The team comprises of a four workers who specialise in different age groups. One worker works with young people from Year 10 and 11 and supports their transition from school, ensuring that an appropriate career pathway is in place. A worker undertakes this role with those

young people who are engaged with the Behaviour Partnership Schools and specialises in supporting young people with learning difficulties. The team also has a worker that supports young people aged 17-19 and the fourth member of the team focuses on those young people 19+.

16. PARTICIPATION AND CONSULTATION WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

16.1 Change Council: 'Young People in Care Changing Lives

16.2 The white paper 'Care Matters' which led to the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, directed every Local Authority to establish a 'Children in Care Council' with direct links to the Lead Member and Director of Children's Services

16.3 Sunderland has had a consultation forum for children and young people in care since 1999. In 2008 this was redeveloped, expanded and strengthened as our Children in Care Council under its new chosen title of "Change:-young people in care changing lives". Generally known as the 'Change Council' it meets monthly, has representatives on the Corporate Parenting Board, communicates with the wider looked after population via its own new magazine 'Change News' and an annual consultation day.

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

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

17. SERVICES

17.1 Health Team.

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

Significant personnel changes have taken place in the past year in this team, and we look forward to the work continuing with the new personnel.

17.2 Virtual Head Teacher and LACE Team.

17.2.1 In 2008 the Authority appointed a 'Virtual Head Teacher' with responsibility for the education of children in the care of Sunderland. This includes those of our children who are in care placements away from Sunderland

- 17.2.2 Every school in Sunderland has had a 'Designated Teacher for Looked After Children' since 2000. In 2008 it became a statutory requirement for all schools
- 17.2.3 The Looked After Children (Education) Team (LACE) comprises three part-time teachers and an Inclusion Officer who advise and support schools and Designated Teachers, carers, social workers and others working to promote educational attainment of looked after children.
- 17.2.4 Personal Education Allowances are available to personalise the educational experience for our young people, including the provision of a range of equipment and services to support individual children.
- 17.2.5 LACE team has co-ordinated a range of initiatives to raise attainment:, all of which highlight the importance of targeted support to small groups of young people:
- Individual Tuition. In the past year 918 hours of one to one tuition has been provided.
 - Letterbox Club: targets looked after children in Primary school years 3 and 5. Each child receives a brightly coloured parcel containing two books, fiction and non-fiction, a maths game, stationary items and a letter, usually from an author, every month for six months (May to October). The time period is selected to include the six week summer holiday period during which time attainment tends to dip. The reading ability of the nineteen children in the cohort was assessed before and after the programme, and eighteen showed significant progress. One child who failed to score on the initial reading test achieved a reading age of 7.0 on the second test and eight increased their reading ages by at least two years in the six month period.
 - Supercamp: Eight Key Stage 4 pupils attended a residential Maths Supercamp at Allenheads in November 2009; leading up to the early entry GCSE, to help borderline students achieved higher grades. Of the five students who entered the maths exam in November, four achieved A*-C grades and one achieved a "D" grade. The remaining three will take the exam at the normal summer sitting this year
 - Laptop scheme: All looked after children in years 4-7 have received an ultra portable laptop with broadband connectivity. 54 families were invited and 49 attended an initial training and set up session at the City Learning Centre in Washington, in December. Follow up sessions on effective use will begin in February 2010. Looked after children who are placed out of area are currently being contacted for the laptop roll out.
 - All looked after children in Y11 have a progression plan and all LAC in Y9 have enhanced support for their option choices

17.3 **Community Support Team**

- 17.4.1 The Community Support Team has five main target areas of work:
- To provide help and specialist support to families and young people who are in crisis and identified as being at immediate risk of becoming looked after.

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

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

17.4 **Independent Visitors**

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

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

17.5 **Independent Advocacy Service**

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

17.5.2 This independent service is provided under a contract with Action for Children North-East Children's Rights Service. Independent Advocates are experienced professionals with backgrounds in social care, health or education, and a sound knowledge of the care system and related services

17.5.3 The service was originally targeted to looked after children and care leavers. In 2008-9 twenty young people (mostly in residential care or Care Leavers) accessed this service. In 2009-10 to date the referral rate has been lower (9 young people) with most requests being from children in foster care

18. NEW DEVELOPMENTS :

18.1 Viewpoint:

- 18.1.1 We are introducing a computerised interactive consultation system for children in care. This will be targeted on children aged 5 to 15 years in permanent Foster Care, and will be operated by two new part-time staff dedicated to visiting the children to support them to prepare for their reviews.
- 18.1.2 The 'Viewpoint' system provides young children with an attractive medium to record and express their views and wishes in preparation for their Looked After Reviews. A version of this is already in use within the Children's Trust within the Youth Offending Service and within Connexions
- 18.1.3 In addition to facilitating individual children's contributions to decisions about their care plans, the system will also enable us over time to aggregate data about issues raised by young people to inform service development

18.2 Care2Work

Sunderland Leaving Care Service are actively involved in the National Care Advisory's project From Care2Work. The project is funded by DCSF and has three main aims:

- To support Local Authorities to develop support packages of work experience, training and employment and career pathways for care leavers.
- To establish a central core of national employers from the private, public and voluntary sectors - including central government departments – who would make a clear commitment to opening up opportunities in their organisations to care leavers.
- To develop a national 'quality mark' for employers who demonstrate commitment to supporting young people in and leaving care.

Currently the Leaving Care Service are working with Sunderland's apprenticeship scheme to ensure care leavers are offered appropriate opportunities in terms of work experience and apprenticeships within the Council

18.3 Independent Reviewing Officers

- 18.3.1 The Government has issued new draft regulations for Care Planning and Reviewing. The consultation period for these ends in February 2010, and it is anticipated that this will result in significant changes in the role and responsibilities of the Independent Reviewing Officer for Looked After Children and may require restructuring of this service.
The Independent Reviewing Officer's role will extend to allow more rigorous scrutiny of the establishment and implementation of Care Plans for individual children

18.4 Looked After Children Education Team

Children's Services are in the process of recruiting an Assistant Virtual Head Teacher to support the management and development of the LACE Team and support for looked after children in schools

19. PLEDGE

Under Care Matters all local authorities are required to develop a 'Pledge' to its looked after children and young people. The Local Authority Pledge to Looked after Children is attached at Appendix 1. Currently the text of the pledge is being produced as a leaflet and will be sent to all out looked after children

20. RECOMMENDATION

That the contents of this report be noted and received by the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee.

Background Reports and Documents:

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

LOCAL AUTHORITY PLEDGE TO LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Our Pledge to Children and Young People

- 1 We will support you to live with your own family or with relatives wherever possible.**
- 2 If you need to come into care, we will make sure that you are safe and properly cared for:**
 - We will ensure that being in care is a positive experience for you, that your needs are met and your hopes for the future are supported and encouraged
 - You will have a qualified social worker and we will not change the social worker unless it is for a good reason and it is discussed with you
 - You will be consulted about your care, and will have an up to date care plan which covers the things which are important for you and for your future
 - You will get the right support to help to do things you need to do because of your culture, religion or ethnic background
 - You will have a place to live with carers who will meet your needs
 - You will be helped to keep in touch with members of your family. If regular visits are not possible we will help you keep in touch by telephone calls or letters, and if you do not see your family for a long time we will make sure that important information about your family is kept for you
- 3 We will ensure that you are listened to:**
 - Your views and wishes will be taken into account when we work with you to make your Care Plan and you will be involved in any decisions about your life or changes in the services you need
 - We will explain things to you in a way that you will understand
 - You will have an Independent Reviewing Officer, to co-ordinate your looked after review, and whom you can contact in between reviews if you are concerned about anything.
 - You may have an Independent Visitor to support you if you need it
 - If you want to say anything about the service you receive you can have an Independent Advocate to help you to make a complaint, suggestion or compliment

4 We will help you to get a good education and enjoy your leisure time:

- You will go to the best school for you and have a designated teacher to make sure you get the help you need. We will not make you change school without good reason
- You will have a Personal Education Plan which sets out what you need to achieve in school and what support you need to fully enjoy school life, including going to after school clubs and activities, trips and educational visits, and extra help if you fall behind
- We will support you to enjoy leisure activities, including sport, music, the arts, hobbies, clubs and young people's organisations.

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

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

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

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

**We will Listen to you
We will Respect you
We will be Proud of you**