

**PLEDGE TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE**

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF SAFEGUARDING**

**1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 This report describes the background to the necessity for and the development of the Pledge, and requests CSLT to approve both the Sunderland Pledge and the North East Region Pledge.

**2 Description of Decision**

- 2.1 CSLT is asked to:
- approve the Pledge and endorse its use as a policy document across all services which provide services to children in care
  - endorse the Regional Pledge which has been drawn up by the Regional Looked After Network (formerly the Regional Multi Agency Looked After Partnership Chairs)
- 2.2 The Director is asked to sign the Regional Pledge on behalf of Sunderland City Council.

**3 Background**

- 3.1 The consultation on 'Care Matters' first proposed the idea of a pledge for children in care in October 2006. This idea was consulted on and received support from children across the country. There was concern expressed nationally that the pledge would be tokenistic and not be implemented.
- 3.2 There was a strong feeling in the consultation that Pledges should be well publicised documents. The White Paper states 'local authorities should see the Pledge as a promise, and there should be consequences if the Pledge is broken'.
- 3.3 The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has published guidance on what should be contained within the Pledge. This is attached as appendix 1 to this report.
- 3.4 Work has been undertaken during 2008 to develop the Pledge under the auspices of the Care Matters Group, a sub-group of the Multi Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP).

Staff throughout Safeguarding were consulted on a draft version, which was then put to a number of meetings of young people, first in 4UM then the Change Council. The final draft attached at Appendix 2 is the result.

- 3.5 The Regional Looked After Network, which represents the 12 North East authorities, has developed its own pledge which was consulted on in a regional event in 2008. This is a broader and less detailed statement of the region's commitment to looked after children, and is to be signed at Director level within each authority. Most Directors have now signed.

#### **4 Current Position**

- 4.1 The Pledge, once approved, will be produced in a child-friendly format consistent with the corporate brand. A number of formats are possible but a four page A5 layout is one option which may be adopted.
- 4.2 The Pledge will be sent to all children in care over the age of 5, and will be given to all children above that age subsequently admitted to care.
- 4.3 It will be publicised throughout Children's Services and the wider Council, in consultation with Corporate Communications.
- 4.4 It is important that the Pledge is used as a functional tool for the provision of services and achievement of outcomes for children in care and care leavers. It will therefore be used:
- by workers and carers as a checklist in drawing up care and pathway plans to ensure that such plans address what the Pledge promises
  - by independent reviewing officers in looked after reviews to check that the decisions of the review are consistent with the Pledge
  - by officers investigating children's complaints, as a reference point for the standard of service that the Council is expected to provide for children in care

#### **5 Reasons for the Decision**

- 5.1 The Pledge is a key element of the Government's recommendations under Care Matters: Time for Change.
- 5.2 Introduction of the Pledge signals the intention of the Council to carry out its responsibilities to children in care effectively and in a way which will have real impact upon outcomes.

- 5.3 Signing up to the regional Pledge enables the Council to continue to participate effectively in regional partnership working to improve outcomes for children in care.

## **6 Alternative Options**

- 6.1 There are no alternative options.

## **7 List of Appendices**

**Appendix 1** DCSF Guidance – Basic Elements of the Pledge

**Appendix 2** Our Pledge

**Appendix 3** The North East Regional Pledge

## **Appendix 1**

### **Basic Elements of the Care Pledge: Guidance from DCSF**

- ☐ A commitment to involve children in decisions which affect them and to take account of what they say
- ☐ A qualified social worker for every child in care with clear arrangements in place for the child in care to contact his/her social worker as necessary
- ☐ Effective assessment of individual needs and an up to date care plan based on those needs
- ☐ Contact with siblings and birth parents in line with their care plan
- ☐ Regular reviews in which children will be enabled to participate meaningfully (particularly for disabled children with communication difficulties)
- ☐ Services which recognise the diverse ethnic and cultural needs of the children
- ☐ Access to advocacy services if children have a complaint
- ☐ An independent reviewing officer to ensure children's rights are upheld
- ☐ Access to high quality free early years provision age 3 and 4
- ☐ A place at a good school
- ☐ A designated teacher in school to ensure high quality support in school
- ☐ Details of support available to participate in positive leisure time activities
- ☐ Support to reduce absence from school
- ☐ Help to catch up with school work if they fall behind
- ☐ Regular assessments of their health (physical and emotional)
- ☐ Details of support available when they move on from care
- ☐ The support young people can expect when entering further and higher education
- ☐ How the local authority will support young people seeking employment, including employment with training.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Our Pledge to Children and Young People**

- **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
  - We will explain things to you in a way that you will understand
  - 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 that your health needs are met**
  - 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**

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Published young people's version will also have the following information which covers the key contacts for each of the main elements of the Pledge:

- Placeholder for name and contact details of Social Worker
- Placeholder for name and contact details of Independent Reviewing Officer
- Contact details for:-
  - Young People's Officer and Advocacy Service
  - Children's Complaints Manager
  - OK2 (Health Team)
  - LACe Team

There will also be a sentence about the how the Pledge can be made accessible to children with disabilities or communication difficulties or for whom English is not a first language.

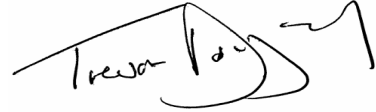
**Appendix 3 – The Regional Pledge - follows**

## Regional Looked After Network Regional Pledge

The 12 Councils who have responsibility for Looked after Children and Care Leavers across the region pledge:-

- That all children and young people in the North East Region who are Looked After are enabled to reach their potential, through:
  - Excellent parenting, which provides permanence and stability;
  - Access to high quality education and training;
  - Opportunities to develop their skills, talents and interests;
  - Access to high quality health provision;
  - Effective support for their transition to adulthood.
- That all such provision reflects understands and responds to their particular needs as children and young people who are looked after, by ensuring that they contribute on a regular basis to the provision process by their active involvement.
- That where it is rational and productive to do so, the twelve local authorities of the North East region will routinely work together (*and with other relevant agencies and organisations*), towards the successful and sustained delivery of the outcomes set out in Care Matters.

It is the expectation that all 12 Councils will develop their own Pledge in consultation with children and young people.

COUNCIL	NAME	TITLE	SIGNATURE	DATE
North Tyneside	Gill Alexander	Director of Children, Young People and Learners		
Redcar & Cleveland				
Northumberland	Trevor Doughty	Executive Director of Children's Services		
Gateshead				
South Tyneside	Helen Watson	Director of Children and Young People		
Stockton	Jane Humphreys	Corporate Director of Children's Services		
Hartlepool				
Newcastle				
Darlington				
Sunderland	Dr Helen Paterson	Director of Children's Services		
Middlesborough				
Durham	David Williams	Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services		