

By: Graham Badman, Managing Director – Children, Families and Education

To: Cabinet - 3 December 2007

Subject: Kent's Pledge for Children and Young People in Care

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: The report describes the work that has been undertaken to develop Kent's Pledge for children and young people in and leaving care, which has been undertaken by a multi-agency/professional working group on behalf of the Looked After Children (LAC) Review Steering group, chaired by Marilyn Hodges.

Introduction

1. (1) Kent's Pledge for children and young people in and leaving care is attached as Appendix 1 and the range of other issues identified from the LAC review are described at Appendix 2.

(2) Section 2 of the report focuses on:

- (a) The purpose of a pledge for children in care
- (b) A description of Kent County Council's (KCC's) Pledge
- (c) Key objectives/outcomes and how each commitment contributes to these
- (d) How the pledge will be evaluated

(3) Section 3 provides a detailed account of the work undertaken to develop the pledge, including the views of children and young people who were consulted throughout its development.

(4) Section 4 focuses on work that has been undertaken to estimate the cost of implementing the pledge and how this is to be funded.

(5) The appendices presented with the report are:

Appendix 1: KCC's Pledge for Children in Care

Appendix 2: Summary of LAC Review

Appendix 3: Pledge source/outcome table

Appendix 4: Key factors that have influenced the pledge

Appendix 5: KCC Children, Families and Education's (CFE's) response to the pledge DVDs

Appendix 6: Work undertaken to estimate cost of implementing the pledge

The Role and Purpose of a Pledge

Purpose

2. (1) The primary purpose of a pledge for children and young people in care is to:
- (a) Inform children and young people what they can expect in terms of services and support from their corporate parent (i.e. the local authority responsible for their care)
 - (b) Encourage best practice with respect to promoting and safeguarding children/young people's welfare
 - (c) Promote better outcomes for children and young people in and leaving care¹
 - (d) Close the widening gap between children in care and their peers. The report titled 'Close the Gap for Children in Care (NCH, 2005) challenged government to make a pledge to address the under-achievement of children in care with the aim that the growing inequalities they face would be closed by 2020).
- (2) Care Matters highlights a number of issues that a pledge should take into account (see Care Matters, White Paper, page 22, paragraph 1.25 and page 23):
- (a) The basic statutory requirements with which local authorities should already be complying;
 - (b) Key opportunities and benefits offered to children in care locally;
 - (c) Support to engage in positive activities as much as possible;
 - (d) Children and young people should be consulted and involved in developing the pledge, including those with special needs and disabled children, and;
 - (e) The pledge should be regularly reviewed and included in the local Children and Young Person's Plan (CYPP).
- (3) The White Paper (see page 22) also highlights a list of basic elements that a pledge should cover:
- A commitment to involve children in decisions which affect them and to take account of their wishes and expressed feelings about the services they receive
 - Qualified social workers 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
 - A placement with carers who can meet needs

¹ Children and young people leaving care are especially vulnerable to experience poor outcomes and fail to achieve their full potential. They are: 5 times less likely to get 5 good GCSE's; 7 times more likely to be excluded; 6 times more likely to truant; 4 times more likely to suffer from mental health problems; 3 times more likely to become pregnant teenagers; 3 times more likely to be cautioned or convicted of an offence (a quarter of adult prisoners have spent time in care); Have a 10% chance of having 10 placements by the age of 11 years; Have a 50% chance of leaving school with no qualifications; Only 6% of young people in the care system continue into HE (compared with 39% of the general school leaver population)

- 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 (IRO) to ensure children's rights are upheld
- Access to high quality free early years provision at age 3 and 4
- A place in 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

Description of Kent's Pledge

3. (1) Kent's pledge for children and young people in care are in two parts, connected together by an overarching statement of purpose:

- (a) A pledge for children and young people in care of Kent County Council
- (b) A pledge for children and young people in care placed in Kent by another local authority (OLA LAC)

(2) A combined pledge was not developed for the following reasons:

- (a) It would be overly confusing for children and young people to follow – especially if some of the promises given remained dependant on whether the were looked after by KCC
- (b) An increased risk of making commitments that could not be kept by KCC for some children and young people,
- (c) It would require making commitments for OLA LAC that KCC is not resourced to provide nor has legal authority to undertake, or
- (d) It would reduce the number of commitments made in the pledge so that it was equally applicable to all and consequently reduce its effective to promote better outcomes for this group of children/young people.

(3) Consideration was also given to developing a pledge in three parts (i.e. pledge for KCC citizen LAC; Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), and OLA LAC). Some of the commitments made in the pledge with respect to UASC are not grant reclaimable. In addition, reference to parent's and family in some of the commitments has had to be qualified to take into account issues for UASC whose parent's whereabouts are unknown.

(4) The working group did not recommend this for the following reasons:

- (a) KCC would be criticized for highlighting inequalities between these two groups of children, whom KCC has equal corporate parenting responsibilities for.
- (b) KCC have already criticized government for doing this in the Home Office consultation paper, 'Promoting Better Outcomes and Planning for UASC' (i.e. Kent's response to the Home Office consultation).

(5) Within the model chosen for the pledge a number of commitments have been identified, which are presented within 6 headings:

- (a) A sense of belonging
- (b) A consistent adult in your life
- (c) A good education
- (d) Good memories for the future
- (e) Preparation for adulthood
- (f) Champion your needs and interests

(6) A copy of the pledge is presented at Appendix 1.

Promoting better outcomes and evaluation

4. (1) Appendix 3 provides a detailed description of each commitment in the pledge in relation to its source (e.g. Care Matters, young people, statutory requirements, research), its contribution to promoting better outcomes, and additional cost.

(2) The commitments identified are all considered necessary to promote better outcomes for children in care. When correctly applied and combined with the range of tasks and duties highlighted in established practice checklists (such as the Social Work Checklists, Checklists for Foster Carers, and model school policy) this should lead to better outcomes for this vulnerable group of children and young people.

(3) The relationship between each commitment with respect to improvements on a given outcome (e.g. see footnote under paragraph 2.1.1) is not necessarily a direct one or easy to measure quantifiably. There are a number of reasons for this:

- (a) There are constraints on making the commitments in the pledge too specific because of the level of diversity that exists within the care population. For example, a commitment that each child in care will achieve 'x' number of GCSEs at A*-C at age 16 or 18 years would not be applicable to a LAC with a significant disability that affected their learning.
- (b) Some of the commitments included have been identified as being important by children/young people (e.g. a commitment for each child/young person to have a passport if legally entitled to own one) and while their link to better outcomes may not be clear or direct, they still have merit for inclusion in the pledge.
- (c) A number of the commitments have been influenced by specific proposals in Care Matters (e.g. see list of basic elements highlighted under paragraph 2.1.3)
- (d) It is also important to ensure that each commitment is realistic and achievable rather than aspirational.

(4) Work is being undertaken to ensure that each commitment in the pledge is incorporated into KCC's Integrated Children's System (ICS). This will mean that it will be possible to know for a given child, groups of children or Kent's whole LAC population the extent to which each commitment is being delivered. The extent to which the pledge helps to achieve local and national (e.g. PAF) targets for children/young people in and leaving care will be evaluated as part of an annual review of the pledge.

(5) Supporting the delivery of the pledge will be a key objective of Integrated Looked After Children Support Services (ILCSS) (described in the report at Appendix 2), which is planned to be up and running from April 2008.

Key influences on the development of the Pledge

5. (1) The recommendations outlined in Care Matters and our response to it (see paragraph 2.1.3 and at Appendix 4, parts A and B) have been a key influence on the contents of the pledge.

(2) The multi-agency/professional working group that developed the pledge worked closely with children and young people and their representatives (e.g. Upfront; 16plus Youth Workers) with respect to style and content.

(3) Consultation with children/young people included two residential events focussing specifically on the pledge. A detailed account of the issues raised by the children/young people at these events is outlined at Appendix 4, part C. The young people developed 2 DVDs to present their views, which were formally presented to Members, managers and practitioners at a viewing on 31st August 2007 in the Sessions House lecture theatre. Appendix 5 outlines CFE's response to the DVDs.

(4) Copies of the DVDs will be made available at the meeting.

(5) Appendix 3 (see source column) also outlines issues raised by children and young people at other events where their views have been sought. These include an event arranged by the Children's Champion Board to meet with a group of children/young people to hear their views in 2005, issues raised at the 2005 16plus young people's conference as well as young people's views on the pledge and Care Matters, which was taken into account when developing Kent's response to the Green Paper.

(6) Children/young people have also been consulted directly on the framework and wording in the pledge, which has included some major editing in response to their feedback.

(7) Consultation has taken place with operational staff at the NCH: Action for Children, whose report 'Close the Gap for Children in Care (2005) (see paragraph 2.1.1 of the report – bullet point 3). Their feedback on Kent's pledge (an earlier draft) was broadly very positive, although a recommendation was made that the pledge would benefit from a greater focus on issues for children with a disability. Kent's Children's Trust also made a similar recommendation.

(8) In response to this feedback the following actions have/are being undertaken:

- (a) Consultation has taken place with managers and practitioners in the Children's Disability teams, which resulted in some amendments/additions to the pledge to make sure that each

commitment is relevant to children with a disability. This includes a new commitment to ensure that every disabled child (approximately 50 LAC) will be provided with a communication passport (which describes how that child communicates) (estimated additional cost to pledge £1000 pa).

- (b) Work is taking place to look at how the pledge should be presented for children with a severe disability (e.g. via widget)
- (c) Arrangements are in place for a further 3 residential events, which are planned for spring/summer 2008. The focus of these events is the development of an information/training DVD in three parts focussing on children/young people's experience of the care system (coming into care, being in care and leaving care). The residential events are being planned by a working group of professionals with children/young people (including children with a disability and UASC). This work is likely to highlight additional issues that will need to be incorporated into the pledge at the next available review.

(9) Further work is to take place on the wording of the pledge by consulting with the plain English Society (recommended at POC, 15/11/2007).

(10) Work is also to take place with the UASC team to look at how the pledge can eventually be produced in different languages (relevant to children/young people from key ethnic minorities). This work will make use of KCC's link with the Refugee Council and other relevant groups to help ensure that the interpretation of the pledge is accurate.

Resource Implications

6. (1) The commitments outlined in the pledge exceed the expectations presented in Care Matters. They include additional commitments that have been highlighted by children and young people as being important to them and/or are considered necessary to support the goal of promoting better outcomes for children and young people in and leaving care.

(2) A number of the commitments have resource implications over and above current resources for services/sections that would be responsible for meeting them. Some of the commitments, if applied to UASC, would not be grant claimable (highlighted in the pledges where applicable). Similarly, the commitment to fund sports and leisure activities for OLA LAC would be an additional cost (although one where negotiation could and should take place with the respective responsible local authorities for reimbursement of these costs).

(3) KCC CFE Finance have produced an analysis of the predicted cost of each of the commitments made in the pledges in three tables (one KCC citizen children in care, UASC and OLA LAC), which is presented at Appendix 6.

(4) Undertaking all of the commitments is estimated to cost an additional £2.6m in the first year, with ongoing costs of around £2.4m pa, based on current numbers of children and young people in care.

(5) The most additional funding that KCC is likely to receive from government to implement Care Matters (including the pledge) is £2m pa (over the next 3 years – 2% of the national £100m implementation grant).

(6) KCC CFE has already earmarked £600k in the MTP (identified from savings in other areas) for implementation of Care Matters, which is to be undertaken primarily through the pledge.

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Background Documents:

None

Our pledge for Kent's children and young people in care

Kent County Council understands that being in care and leaving care isn't always easy and that it can bring additional challenges and pressures for you. If we are to get it right for you we need to make a real difference to help you achieve your best and gain success in your life.

Our pledge includes a number of promises to you that will help make sure that your time in care is a positive experience. These are based around 6 themes:

- a sense of belonging
- a consistent adult in your life
- a good education
- good memories for the future
- preparation for adulthood
- champion your needs and interests

We are making a pledge to you because you are a child/young person in care or leaving care living in Kent.

Ideally we would want to make the same promises to all children in care living in Kent but this is not possible at present because your needs are different and it also depends on which local authority is responsible for your care. It is equally important to ensure that the promises that we make to you are ones that we are confident that we can keep and that will be important to you and have a positive effect in your life.

This is why we have made two separate pledges. These are:

- A pledge for children in the care of Kent County Council, and
- A pledge for children in care placed in Kent by another local authority

We will review our pledge to you on a regular basis so that when possible we will increase the promises that we make and listen to the views of children and young people in care.

[Insert name and signature of Graham Badman and Lead Member]

Pledge for Children and young people in care of Kent County Council

Kent County Council understands that being in care and leaving care isn't always easy and that it can bring additional challenges and pressures for you. If we are to get it right for you we need to make a real difference to help you achieve your best and gain success in your life.

Our pledge includes a number of promises to you that will help make sure that your time in care is a positive experience. These are based around 6 themes:

- a sense of belonging
- a consistent adult in your life
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- good memories for the future
- preparation for adulthood
- champion your needs and interests

We will review our pledge to you on a regular basis so that when possible we will increase the promises that we make and listen to the views of children and young people in care.

[Insert name and signature of Graham Badman and Lead Member]

A sense of belonging

We will:

- Provide a placement for you as near as possible to your family and friends
- Help you maintain contact with family and/or friends and when this is not possible give you a clear reason why
- Ensure that you and where appropriate your parent's views of the type of carers that you would want are taken into account when choosing your placement and respite care
- When making decisions we will take into account your age, background and beliefs, including your ethnic and cultural needs and needs that may be as a result of a disability especially communication
- Arrange for you to get your national insurance number for your 16th birthday or as soon as possible after being entitled to have one
- Get you a passport by your 16th birthday if you are legally entitled to have one – sooner if you need one to go on holidays with your carers and take part in school activities
- Tell you who your corporate parents are and how you can contact them

A consistent adult in your life

We will:

- Ensure that you have a named social worker/caseworker and Independent Reviewing Officer and know how you can contact them
- Make sure that you have at least one person in your life who you can expect to be around throughout your time in care

A good education

We will:

- Ensure that you have a place at a school that will enable you to do your best
- Make sure that 3 and 4 year old children in care can go to early years education
- Work with your school and the designated teacher¹ to help you do your best
- Provide opportunities and support to pursue your education beyond 16 years, including help going to university or further education if you want to do this
- Help you catch-up with school work if you fall behind
- Expect your carers to take an active interest in your education and make positive links with your school, including attending parent's evenings and other school events
- Provide a computer for you if you have been in care for 6 months or more and are aged 11 years or over and, where appropriate, access to the internet
- Celebrate your achievements and success

¹All schools are expected to appoint a designated teacher who is responsible for co-ordination all of the schools services for those children in care who attend the school

Good memories for the future

We will:

- Provide at least 4 hours a week of opportunities to pursue hobbies and interests (including sports, art and music)^{*}
- Help you build a photo album of key people in your life and places you have been to while in care

Preparation for adulthood

We will:

- Make sure that you are consulted about key decisions being made in your life
- If you have a disability we will make sure that you have your own 'communication passport' that tells others how you communicate and how they can communicate to you
- Ensure that accommodation provided to young people preparing to leave care is safe and properly supported - with temporary, unsuitable accommodation, being a last resort and used for as little time as possible
- Invest in a savings account for you a sum of £100 for every year you are in care. This money will be available to you on your 18th birthday^{*}
- Up to your 21st birthday, help you with council tax and losing out on housing benefit as a result of taking part in education, training and low paid employment^{*}
- Help and support you take up appropriate opportunities for training, further education and employment
- £1000 for every year you complete in Higher Education or £2000 for the whole period of the course, whichever is the greater^{*}
- Ensure that your transition to adult services if you require them is as smooth as possible

Champion your needs and interests

We will:

- Ensure that you are able to communicate your wishes, feelings and interests – taking into account any disabilities you have
- Listen to your wishes and feelings before making decisions that affect you and support you if you need help to do this
- Work with you and your family to make sure that plans for your care are up to date and meet your educational, health and care needs
- Make sure that you know how to complain and how to get in touch with Upfront (Kent's Children's Rights Service), who can provide support to help you pursue a complaint
- Provide you with access to a solicitor (at our cost) if you want legal advice about your care order, or any other legal order affecting you – such as contact with certain people in your life

Pledge for children and young people in care placed in Kent by another local authority

Kent County Council understands that being in care and leaving care isn't always easy and that it can bring additional challenges and pressures for you. If we are to get it right for you we need to make a real difference to help you achieve your best and gain success in your life.

Our pledge includes a number of promises to you that will help to ensure that your time in care is a positive experience. These are based around 6 themes:

- a sense of belonging
- a consistent adult in your life
- a good education
- good memories for the future
- preparation for adulthood
- champion your needs and interests

We see our role as supporting your local authority meet their responsibilities to you so that you can be treated the same as all other children in care living in Kent. This includes encouraging your local authority to include in their pledge to you a range of promises, like the ones that we can make to children and young people in care of Kent County Council.

We will review our pledge to you on a regular basis so that when possible we will increase the promises that we make and listen to the views of children and young people in care.

[Insert name and signature of Graham Badman and Lead Member]

A sense of belonging

We will:

- Help your local authority ensure that your care plan includes extra help to enable you to attend school and maintain contact with important people in your life
- Make sure you know who your corporate parents are and how you can contact them

A consistent adult in your life

We will:

- Ask the local authority responsible for your care to ensure that you have a named Independent Reviewing Officer and a named Social Worker who visits you on a regular basis and tells you how to contact them, and
- Ask your local authority to make sure that you have at least one person in your life who you can expect to be around throughout your childhood

A good education

We will:

- Work with your social worker to ensure that you have a place at a school that will help you to do your best
- Work with your school and the designated teacher¹ to help you do your best
- Help you catch-up with school work if you fall behind
- Celebrate your achievements and success

¹Schools are expected to appoint a designated teacher who is responsible for co-ordinating all of the schools services for those children in care who attend the school

Good memories for the future

We will:

- Provide at least 4 hours a week of opportunities to pursue hobbies and interests (including sports and music)

Preparation for adulthood

We will:

- Ask the local authority responsible for your care to make sure that you are consulted about key decisions being made in your life

Champion your needs and interests

We will:

- Encourage you to communicate your wishes, interests and feelings – taking into account any disabilities you have
- Ask the local authority responsible for your care to make sure that you know how to complain and how you can access a Children's Rights Service who can provide support to help you pursue a complaint
- Support you, your carers and your local authority in making sure that plans for your education and health needs are up-to-date
- Remind your local authority of their responsibility to provide you with access to a solicitor if you want legal advice about your care order, or any other legal order affecting you – such as contact with certain people in your life

LAC Review summary report

Introduction

1. Kent had begun to look how it might improve services for Looked after Children ahead of the government green paper 'Care Matters' and following its publication in October 2006 the Managing Director of CFE commissioned the Director of the Strategy, Policy and Performance Division to conduct a formal review.

Process

2. (1) A multi-agency officer LAC Steering Group, chaired by the Director of Strategy, Policy and Performance, was set up to undertake the detailed work required by the Review process.

(2) Information to inform the review was gathered through a range of mechanisms:

- Feedback from partner agencies during the Care Matters consultation
- Consultation events with Head teachers, young people, Elected Members, foster carers, social work practitioners, 16+, Upfront and others
- Review of structural arrangements
- Topic investigations of the robustness of Kent's policy/practice
- Report on the work of the LAC Strategy Group (sub group of Kent's Children's Trust)
- Identification of sources of finance
- Compilation of background information

(3) The LAC Review Steering Group findings were reported to the Managing Director of CFE on 19 June 2007 and its recommendations were accepted.

LAC Review recommendations and progress

3. The LAC Review process resulted in many recommendations and the following, which include a report on progress, represent a selection that were considered to be high priority:

- Make representations to Health to prioritise development of more responsive mental health services for LAC including providing a mental health assessment for all LAC.

Interim project capacity has been identified to undertake research to inform a specification for services for vulnerable young people pending the arrival of the newly appointed CAMHS Project Manager. Work is also in hand to include a mental health assessment as part of the initial health assessment.

- Extend Family Group Conference service to wider age groups and earlier intervention;

The service to wider age groups will shortly be in place and discussion about intervening earlier has started.

- Local Children's Trust arrangements to prioritise the commissioning of early intervention services that are effective in preventing LAC;

Kent Children's Trust has agreed that the commissioning of such services should be prioritised.

- Kent should develop an Adolescent Strategy;

A steering group is in place and a specification for this service is in an advanced stage of development.

- Kent should lobby for 'funding to follow the child' to ensure other authority LAC are not disadvantaged;

Consideration is being given to the setting up of a Member Select Committee on this topic in the autumn.

- Kent should ensure LAC are prioritised as Clusters implement arrangements to prevent exclusions and ensure access to education for excluded pupils;

This work has started as part of a range of actions to promote education of LAC.

- Kent should consider lobbying as part of the Care Matters consultation for tax incentives that will encourage foster carers to continue to care for care leavers beyond 18;

The Managing Director, CFE will be writing to the Minister about this.

- Kent should set up of a multi-agency LAC Support Team which would be deployed across 3 areas to improve integrated working that will include professionals from CFE, Health and Connexions and be hosted by a Cluster under Kent's local Children's Trust arrangements;

A steering group has been set up to take this recommendation forward. It is expected that the team will be in place by April 2008.

- Kent should develop multi-agency Protocols for LAC;

It is expected that these will be in place during spring 2008.

Resources

5. The resource implications of both the review and the Pledge have been costed where possible and incorporated into Kent's Medium Term Planning process. It is anticipated that some activity can be covered within existing budgets. The steering group is currently exploring how the cost of delivering the pledge could be reduced through potential sponsorship arrangements.

LAC action matrix

6. (1) In addition to the recommendations set out above an Action Plan Matrix is being developed in order to ensure the other findings of the sub groups are also pursued as part of the overarching strategy to improve services for LAC.

(2) It had also become evident during the review that a range of actions were already being taken forward under the aegis of the LAC Strategy Group, sub group of Kent Children's Trust and in other forums. Therefore, the Matrix has been expanded to incorporate not only these tasks but also those set out in the Care Matters White Paper which are believed to be good practice or are likely to be required. This integrated plan, set out using the headings of Care Matters, should clarify arrangements and simplify monitoring.

Key factors that have influenced the contents of the pledge

A) Pledge issues suggested by Care Matters (Green Paper)

- A choice, with their Social Worker, of high quality placements
- 24/7 support from the lead professional or an out of hours contact
- At least four hours a week of positive out of school activities
- Annual health assessments (x2 for under 5's) and x2 yearly dental check-ups
- An independent advocate
- A chance to take part in volunteering
- The choice of when to move on to enter adult life, up to the age of 18
- A chance to have their voice heard and influence the work of the local authority through participation in a 'Children In Care Council'

B) Issues highlighted by Kent County Council in response to Care Matters (Green Paper)

Universal Pledge:

- *A commitment to ensure that 3 and 4 year olds access early years education.*
- *A choice of a good school that is helping each child to do their best*
- *A commitment to provide twice yearly health assessments for under 5's and annual health assessments and twice yearly dental check-ups for older children from an NHS dentist*
- *To enable children/young people to express their wishes and feelings in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken into account*
- *To have high but achievable expectations for achievement for each child/young person*
- *A minimum entitlement of 2.5 hours per week to sport and leisure activities (see also question 19)*
- *Not to be discriminated against for any reason*
- *To be told how to complain if things go wrong and to deal with any complaint properly*

Pledge as Corporate Parent:

- *Encouragement to participate in making decisions and plans for your future*
- *Timely out-of-school educational support*
- *Reducing changes of Social Worker/lead professional and maintaining stability of other key professionals in the child's life (especially at transition stages)*
- *To provide information to children/young people about their family and other important people in their lives and to promote contact with them or a clear explanation of why it is not possible*
- *A safe environment/home with more options/choice so that it is right for each child/young person*
- *To promote a sense of permanency for the child*
- *An independent advocate (see also question 10)*

- *To prepare young people for life as an adult with the necessary help available to you while you are doing this, including*
- *Help and support while continuing in full-time education beyond age 16 years*
- *To be proactive in keeping in touch with all young people looked after their 16th birthday to at least 21 years*

Other things that could be included in a pledge as corporate parent are:

- *For young people who were Looked After beyond their 16th birthday to be exempt from paying council tax once living independently up to their 21st birthday (this is currently being explored in Kent at the request of young people) – this is also suggested under question 23*
- *To pursue an application for criminal injuries compensation for all children in the care of the local authority who have been subject to abuse or neglect or an act of criminal violence. Kent County Council has already established a fast-track service with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority and currently holds approximately £1.6m in criminal injuries awards that it has been successful in obtaining for children/young people looked after by the local authority.*

C) Issues Raised from consulting with Children and Young People

Two residential activity events took place in March 2007 in order to help ascertain the views of children and young people with experience of the looked after system, about what they want in a pledge. These events took place at the Hardelot Education Centre in France and focussed on different age groups of children/young people. 16plus staff supervised the first residential event (9/03/07 to 11/03/07), which involved looked after children (16 years upward) and care leavers. The second residential event (16/03/07 to 18/03/07) was arranged with the assistance of Upfront (Children's Rights Services) and focussed on a generally younger group of children and young people, ranging in age from 10 years to 18 years. The work of the children/young people is being developed into two DVDs – one for each group and due for formal release in August 2007.

The key elements of what the children and young people highlighted as needing to be included in Kent's Pledge are outlined below:

Views expressed by the younger group of children/young people supervised by Upfront (aged 10 years to 18 years)

18 plus NOT 16 plus. The group felt that 16 years is too young to start preparing to move on into independent living. They show this in the DVD by standing in a circle holding hands with another a young person in the middle of the circle. This was to show how isolated and scared the young person felt and the barrier of having no control over their life at this point. The young people also made the point that if you were living with birth parents you would not necessarily leave home so young. The young person then runs into the barrier and each time a member of the circle shouts out at them, cook for yourself, clean, budget etc, to the point that the young person is bounced around and so overwhelmed that he collapses.

Tact in schools. It is upsetting for children in care when teachers are insensitive or forgetful of their situation. This can cause unnecessary distress or isolation for the young person. The example given in the DVD was a Mother's Day card. This upset the young person so much that she ended up putting it in the bin. The group was saying how even the smallest comment could cause bullying or a feeling of being different.

A Social worker is for life not just for Christmas! There was a strong feeling of being passed around, leaving children with a feeling of no worth or importance. One group member stated

“It’s as if social workers unwrap us and then throw us away.”

The DVD shows a young person being introduced to a number of social workers and not one of them doing as he promised, the promise being their passport.

Respite with someone you know. The group stated how upsetting it was when foster families go away on family holidays without them. It upsets them even more when they are then left to stay with respite carers they don’t even know. One group member stated,

“You are in care initially, therefore there is a feeling of rejection, you are then rejected again by your foster family, so that feeling is reinforced and the trust is lost each time you are put into respite.”

This part of the DVD was filmed on the beach to create the feeling of isolation and feeling alone. The young people wrote in the sand words that described how this situation made them feel. After being told that they were going on respite with strangers they then saw their foster family excitedly running across and destroying all their feelings that they had written in the sand.

The young people wrote a poem expressing themselves, which they have not included in the DVD, but would like the LAC Review Group to read.

*Social workers come and go, but problems stay the same
A new one comes in every week but doesn’t learn my name
They promise this, they promise that, they say it’s all for me
But nothing ever happens, at least nothing I can see.*

The issues highlighted by older young people (aged 17 years to 20 years)

This group of young people decided to base their DVD around a news programme with an anchorman introducing the various reports, each focussing on a different issue important to them in a pledge. The first and last pledges are acted out, the middle three are to have voiceovers.

Pledges will come up as bullet points after each clip and then all five will be displayed at the end of the news bulletin.

Accommodation issues - *“a safe environment/home with more options/choice so that it is right for each child/young person”*

Graig, a Roving Reporter interviews two young people, one in a supportive placement where he is doing well at college and feels happy and secure, the other where he has dropped out of education and receives no support or encouragement at home.

Identity issues - *“to ensure each young person has a passport and National Insurance number before the transition to 16plus”*

- 1) Garen visits the Army Recruitment Centre to apply to join up. He is asked for his NI number but cannot produce it and is told to come back when he's got one. He asks how he can get one and is told that he'll have to find out for himself.

2) A group of young people is filmed boarding a minibus to go away on a residential experience abroad. Matt is left behind because he doesn't have a passport.

Sport accessibility - *"a minimum entitlement of 2.5 hours per week of funded sports and leisure activity"*

A young man is lazing in bed, because he can't afford to access sports/leisure facilities and he can't afford the bus/train fare to get there. The DVD shows a variety of sporting activities, highlighting that participation in sports and leisure opportunities encourage a healthy lifestyle and helps to develop social skills and general wellbeing, promoting confidence and self-esteem.

Contact issue - *"to be proactive in keeping in touch with all young people looked after, after their 16th birthday to at least 21 years"*

Still picture of a young man, inset still picture of a worker, both on telephone. Message that all young people should have as an absolute minimum a telephone call from their worker every month until at least their 21st birthday.

Life skills issues - *"to prepare you for life as an adult with the necessary help available to you while you are doing this"*

- 1) Matt struggles to put a cover on his duvet. Worker appears and demonstrates how to do it.
- 2) Garen struggling with his bills and cash. Worker appears to help him budget.
- 3) Matt asks for help in learning basic life skills.
- 4) Still pictures of various life skills - cooking, budgeting, health, hygiene, first aid, etc, etc.

Message that young people need to be taught basic life skills, once learnt, never forgotten

CFE's response to young people's Hardelet DVDs

The DVDs produced by children and young people in and leaving care with respect to their views on a pledge include a number of issues. These are summarised below together with KCC CFEs response to them. The DVDs and KCC CFEs response were presented to children/young people, key managers within KCC and partner agencies and County Council Members at a formal launch of the DVDs on 31st August 2007.

Guarantee a safe home environment, with more choices, so that it is right for every young person.

- We will look at ways in which young people can be more involved in deciding who should be a foster carer.
- We will look at how young people can get involved in providing training to carers and social workers, so that they have a better understanding of what it means to be in care.
- We will ask Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to make sure that:
 - the social worker is seeing the child/young person regularly, with opportunities to see them on their own.
 - the child/young person can see their IRO before the review starts.
- We want to recruit more foster carers so that children/young people have more choice about where they go to live.

Ensure that every young person has a passport and a National Insurance number

- We have included a commitment to both of these requests in Kent's pledge for children in care.
- We have asked Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to ensure that these issues are checked during the review meeting.
- We have added a check onto the Looked After Children Review form to remind IROs of the need to check these documents for children/young people aged 15yrs and upwards.
- We will work with 16plus to make sure the pathway plan includes a check for passports and National Insurance numbers.

Provide a minimum of 2.5 hours funded sport and activities per week

- We do not think that this is enough, and we are looking at increasing this to 4 hours per week in Kent's pledge. (we will keep you updated)

Be proactive in keeping in touch with all looked after young people after their 16th birthday, until they are at least 21 years old, with a minimum of one telephone call per month

- 16plus have amended their service plan so that it includes a commitment to do this

Prepare each young person for life as an adult, and make sure that the necessary help is available

- We agree that leaving care at 16 years old to live independently is too early for most young people.
- We think that the idea of a life skills booklet/CD is a very good one. We will produce this with 16plus, with help from young people. It will include information about local resources and places to get help and advice.
- We recognise that carers need more training on this.
- We will explore with 16plus how each young person can have a mentor for the first year of living independently. This could be a foster carer, another young person, a family member or an independent visitor.

Tact in schools - teachers to be more sensitive to the needs of children and young people in care

- This is an issue for all children in schools, but is particularly important for children and young people in care.
- We will take up confidentially and discretely any issues of insensitivity in school that we become aware of with the designated teacher and headteacher, so that they are aware of the impact that this has had and how it can be prevented in future.
- We already provide training to teachers about the needs of children and young people in care.
- We will explore how we can involve more young people in training with teachers and school governors.

Consistent adults - including fewer changes of social worker

- Through Kent's pledge, we are looking at how we can ensure that each child and young person has at least one consistent adult in their lives while they are in care

Respite care with people you know

- We need to make the process of providing two weeks of respite care per annum for foster carers more child friendly.
- Many foster carers who use their respite already arrange for the child / young person to be cared for in their home, with a respite carer who already knows the child / young person.
- Some carers also choose not to use respite until after the children and young people have left the placement.
- We will continue to encourage both of these options.
- We will look at how we can reward carers with two weeks additional pay in place of respite.
- We will look at how we can enable children and young people to choose their respite carer and ensure consistency of respite while in care.