

By: Marilyn Hodges, Director of Strategy, Policy & Performance

To: Children Families and Education Policy Overview Committee -
15 November 2007

Subject: LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN REVIEW

Classification: Unrestricted

File Ref:

Summary: Reports key findings of the Looked after Children Review and seeks endorsement from Members for Kent's Pledge

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 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.

Kent Pledge

4. The Care Matters white paper places a duty on local authorities to produce a pledge for LAC that sets out the services and support they can expect to receive as a minimum entitlement. The LAC Steering Group began work on a pledge in advance of the white paper and proposals are due to be brought to Members for approval under the following 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

The proposed Pledge together with costings is attached under appendices 1 and 2.

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.

Recommendations

7. Members of the Children Families and Education Policy Overview Committee are asked to:
 - (a) Note and endorse the recommendations of the LAC Review.
 - (b) Endorse the Kent Pledge.

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Background Documents

None

Kent's Pledge for children and young people in and leaving care

Summary

Care Matters: Time for Change places an expectation on all local authorities to develop a pledge* for the children in their care (Care Matters, page 22, paragraph 1.25).

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 as part of the work of the LAC Review Steering group.

Background information

Care Matters highlights a number of issues that a pledge for children in care should take into account (Care Matters, page 22, paragraph 1.25 and 23):

- The basic statutory requirements with which local authorities should already be complying
- Key opportunities and benefits offered to children in care locally
- Support to engage in positive activities as much as possible
- Children and young people should be consulted and involved in developing the pledge, including those with special needs and disabled children, and
- The pledge should be regularly reviewed and reflected in the local CYPP

A pledge must also cover the following basic elements:

- 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
- 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 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

Consultations

The working group consulted widely when developing the pledge. In addition to the recommendations outlined in Care Matters (above) and Kent's response to Care Matters (Green Paper), two residential activity events took place at Hardelot (France) in March 2007, with children and young people with experience of being in care. 16plus staff supervised the first residential event (9/03/07 to 11/03/07), which involved looking 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/young people (10 years to 18 years). Each residential group produced a DVD, which were formally presented to managers and practitioners in a launch that took place in August 2007.

Development of the Pledge

Developing a pledge for Kent's children in care population needs to ensure that the framework and language is easy for children and young people to understand. The diversity of Kent's children in care population, including unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and children in care placed in Kent by other local authorities (OLA LAC), places additional barriers on developing a single pledge.

In order to address these issues the pledge includes two parts, which are connected by an overarching statement of purpose:

- 1) A pledge for children and young people in care of Kent County Council
- 2) A pledge for children and young people in care placed in Kent by another local authority

A pledge in two parts does present some difficulties of fit when comparing issues for KCC's citizen children in care and UASC. Some of the commitments in the pledge require additional resources that are not grant claimable for UASC (marked with a '*' in the pledge). 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.

An alternative approach would be to produce a pledge in three parts – separating out KCC's citizen children in care from UASC. KCC is likely to be criticized for highlighting inequalities between these two groups of children, whom KCC has equal corporate parenting responsibilities for. A pledge in three parts is, therefore, not recommended.

Resource implications

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).

Undertaking all of the commitments under Care Matters – (through the pledge), will cost an estimated £2.6 million pa, based on current numbers of children and young people in care - excluding mental health screenings.

The most additional funding that KCC will receive from Government to implement Care Matters (including the pledge) will be £2m pa (over next three years - 2% of the national £100m pa grant total for implementing Care Matters).

KCC CFE has already earmarked £600k in the MTP (identified from savings in other areas) for Care Matters and the pledge.

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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.

Graham Badman

Managing Director – Children, Families and Education

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
- a good education
- 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.

Graham Badman

Managing Director – Children, Families and Education

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
- 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 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

*All schools 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, 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
- 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*

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.

Graham Badman

Managing Director – Children, Families and Education

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

^{*}Schools 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