

To: Children's Champion Board: 21 May 2008

From: Marilyn Hodges, CFE Director Strategy, Policy and Performance and Bill Anderson, CFE Director Children's Social Services

Subject: Update on actions identified from the meeting with Looked After Children and Care Leavers on 23/01/2008

Summary

The report provides an update on the issues and actions raised from two meetings with Kent County Council's (KCC) Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers and County Council Members from KCC's Children's Champion Board (CCB). The first meeting took place on the evening of 23 January 2008, at Session's House and involved members of KCC's CCB who met with a group of Looked After Children and Care Leavers supported by Upfront and 16plus. A summary of the event with key actions identified was presented in a report to the CCB on 12 March 2008. The second meeting took place on 13 February 2008, which involved Paul Carter and Keith Ferrin, who met with a group of Care Leavers supported by Upfront and 16plus.

Requested Outcomes: CCB are asked note the progress that is being made with respect to each of the actions outlined under section 1 of the report.

1. Update on issues raised and actions undertaken

A brief summary of each of the issues raised and discussed at the CCB meeting and the meeting with Paul Carter and Keith Ferrin is outlined below.

Overnight stays at friends houses – some of the young people highlighted that this is still an issue even though policy and guidance on this was made more flexible in 2004 to reflect national guidance (i.e. LAC (2004) 4).

"It's intrusive to have friends police checked if you want to go and sleep over at theirs."

Action – Paul Brightwell to liaise with KCC fostering service etc to ensure that all foster carers are aware of KCC Children Family Health and Education directorate's (CFHE) guidance on delegation of consents for overnight stays.

Update:

- **The County Manager of KCC Fostering Service has been made aware of this issue and asked to remind her staff and foster carers and fostering Social Workers about the delegation of consents for overnight stays and school trips.**

Foster Carers boundaries – some of the young people complained that their foster carer were setting too strict curfews on when they should be back at home in the evenings. It was agreed by all that this should be an area open to negotiation between the young person, their parents and their Foster Carer.

"If it's a school night you should do your homework first – school comes first. Carers should be more flexible - weekends should be later."

Actions – Paul Brightwell to raise with fostering service to ensure that the placement plan meeting (as part of the placement information record) includes an age appropriate discussion on this issue. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to also be informed of this issue and to ensure that they ask to see the placement plan.

Update:

- **The County Manager of KCC CFHE Fostering Service has been made aware of this issue and asked to take forward the proposal to include a discussion of this issue in the placement plan meeting, which is chaired by Fostering Social Workers.**
- **IROs have also been asked to ensure that they check that this issue has been covered at the child/young person's LAC review meeting.**

LAC Reviews and IRO role – The young people did not always feel able to raise issues they wanted to at their LAC review meeting, especially any criticisms about their foster carer/placement. The young people wanted more opportunities to be able to contact their IRO prior to the day of their review meeting.

“I can't talk about my foster carers at the review because they are sitting there and it would be difficult to ask them to leave.”

“I went to my brother's review when his placement broke down. I advocated for him but the foster carers don't like you to be there, saying what they should/shouldn't do. You should be able to choose an advocate rather than have one (IRO) imposed.”

“I would like to be able to chair my own review meeting with the IRO just helping me.”
[young person over 16yrs]

Actions – Regular meetings between IROs and LAC have already been arranged via Upfront (KCC's advocacy service for LAC). IRO invitation cards (to be implemented from February 2008) now include each IROs contact details with an invite to contact them. IRO service to explore with young people and Family Group Conferencing Service, how young people (wanting to) can be supported in chairing their LAC review. Issue to also be raised at SE regional IRO network group.

Update:

- **Regular meetings between IROs and young people are continuing to take place.**
- **The IRO invitation cards and leaflets have been implemented and include IRO contact details.**
- **The IRO service development plan for 2008/09 includes a focus on how to enable young people to be assisted by the IRO in chairing their own LAC review meetings. Work on this will be undertaken later in the year.**

Housing - this is an area that is seen as being extremely important to young people - especially Care Leavers and LAC aged 16 years plus, despite the work that has been undertaken in this area since the issue was last realised by young people (e.g. see KCC's Children and Young Person Plan and LAC position statement, priority 20).

“I need to feel safe and have choice. I was almost sent to a B&B at 16 but I refused.”
[young person now aged 20]

“At 21 support ends but what if you lose your job soon after, get into difficulty when still settling or you lose your home?”

Paul Carter has asked that an exploration be given to the development of more foyer projects and that he will ask that an item on 'housing strategy for care leavers/young people' is placed on the agenda when he meets with the district councils.

Actions -

Paul Carter to take forward item on housing strategy for Care Leavers/young people with district councils

An Issues Paper on housing for Care Leavers/young people to be presented to Kent's Trust Board (KTB).

Update:

- **An issues paper will be produced by Mick McCarthy (16plus Manager) and Paul Brightwell (Policy and Performance Manager) for KTB/LAC Strategy Group, later in 2008/09.**
- **Paul Carter is organising a half session with Kent Leaders (District Councils) to discuss the housing strategy, which will include a focus on the needs of Care Leavers. This is expected to take place in late summer.**

Benefits/travel – All of the young people were either experiencing financial difficulty or worried that they would be once they left foster care – especially after the age of 18.

"I was told I could shop on £10 per week. I claim Housing benefit and must pay two thirds of my accommodation. I have £60 a week left to live on – that's everything."

"You can't eat healthily – as Government advises – on what you get. LAC should get a vegetable and fruit voucher like young mums, to help eat healthily."

"There should be an officer who is specialist in Benefits."

"The benefits agency are not as responsive to young people as 16plus are."

Actions – Kent's pledge includes a commitment for ongoing financial support to care leavers (up to 21) with council tax and lost housing benefit due to being in Further Education or employment. Further work to be undertaken with 16plus – including issue of access to benefits advice and more support on promoting healthy eating.

Update:

- **16plus have been notified of issues raised by young people and asked to review how benefits advice is provided to young people living independently, or in the process of leaving care.**
- **Work has not yet been undertaken to look at the issue of promoting healthy eating – including the issue of how vegetable vouchers could be issued to Care Leavers. Work on this will be undertaken later in 2008/09.**

Social Workers – Aside from the view of one young person who didn't want a Social Worker at all, the young people valued having a Social Worker but wanted more opportunities to be able to have time with them.

"Need more Social Workers at weekends, especially when there is a crisis. Some problems can't wait until Monday."

"You may need a Social Worker for support beyond age 21."

Actions – the importance of this issue and the importance of access to help and support is recognised. Kent's pledge already includes a commitment for all LAC to have a named Social Worker, IRO and LAC Nurse – with over £1m of additional funding on top of KCC's Care Matters Grant allocation. Access to their SWs at weekends will be explored with CFHE's Children's Social Services Section – although this is not a straightforward issue given that young people want contact with someone that they already know.

Short-break care (respite) – This issue was also raised by young people in their pledge DVD 'All about us', and focuses on the importance of ensuring ways that LAC can remain in their foster home if their carer is away on respite or being able to have a choice in who their respite carers are.

"I want to go to people I know – not strangers. There's no choice."

Actions – work on this issue is already being undertaken by KCC Fostering Service in response to the issues raised by young people in their DVD 'All about us' (see appendix 3).

Confidentiality – the young people focussed on the importance of confidentiality within schools. There were mixed views between them about whether teachers should be told whether a child is looked after.

"School doesn't need to know you are LAC – it's irrelevant." (2 young people currently at school)

"You get upset if someone mentions mum, so I think they should know."

"Ok, it's different for everyone. It needs careful treatment to do the right thing for each person."

"My school found out and I had lots of nosey and rude questions and was bullied."

Actions – Schools, SWs, Foster Carers and IROs have already been made aware of this issue – although a further memo will be sent out reminding all of the importance of this issue for LAC.

Update:

- **A memo from Graham Badman will be sent to all schools, foster carers and IROs reminding them of the importance of respecting LAC's confidentiality.**

Computers/Internet – The young people raised the importance of having their own computer and internet access and were very pleased to be told that this commitment is already included in Kent's pledge (see appendix 2).

Difficulties getting passports and driving licenses – The issue of passports has been raised previously by young people (see pledge DVD 'The Big Issue') and is included as a commitment in Kent's pledge (appendix 2).

Action - The issue of driving licenses is a new issue to us and will be explored with 16plus to see how this issue can be resolved.

Update:

- **16plus have confirmed that they do support young people to apply for a driving license and driving lessons when this is needed as part of employment and when this is helpful in providing young people with a form of identification.**
- **16plus also run a motorbike course where the young people have their motorbike licenses paid for and they are entered for a test as part of the course. The course is very popular with young people.**

More Youth Workers – the issue raised by the young people is similar to that of SWs – they want more of them/youth worker time and asked that this issue be looked at by 16plus.

Action – 16plus Service and Youth Service will be asked to look at this issue and respond to the young people's request.

Update:

- **16plus (Sue Clifton and Mick McCarthy) are to meet with John Turner (Assistant Head of the Youth Service) in May 2008 to discuss the current working relationships between 16plus and the Youth Service – and to seek additional Youth Worker time.**
- **16plus have also been asked to consider undertaking a survey of young people's views of the support they receive – including their views on the importance of Youth Workers and Social Workers, in order to establish more fully young people's views on this issue.**

Journey into care – One young person felt that his journey into care was not the right thing for him and that he shouldn't have been in care but allowed to have remained at home. Another young person said that she had been told that she and her brother would remain in the same placement – but that he had since been moved to a different placement at short notice and that she only gets to see him once a month.

Action - In both cases, the young people (with support from their youth workers attending the meeting) were invited to contact Paul Brightwell, who then could look into their personal issues in more depth.

Update:

- **Neither of the young people have chosen to take up the offer from Paul Brightwell. Given the time that has elapsed since the meeting it is unlikely that they will take up this offer – although a reminder of this offer has been given to Upfront and 16plus should the young people wish to at a later date.**

Transport – At the meeting on 13 February 2008, Paul Carter informed the young people that he is exploring whether Kent's Freedom Pass can be made available to Looked After Children and Care Leavers beyond their 16th birthday up to at least 18 years and ideally up to their 21st birthday.

Update:

- **It has been agreed by KCC Cabinet that the freedom pass will be extended to LAC and Care Leavers aged 16 to 21 years in the areas in Kent that it is available and in other areas as the scheme is extended.**

2. Next Steps

A Corporate Parenting workshop for elected members is taking place on 6 June 2008, which will involve young people from Kent's 16plus service in co-hosting the event and contributing to the workshop agenda.

Following on from the workshop a further awayday event for CCB members and scrutiny panel members to focus on their targeted corporate parenting roles and responsibilities - to take place in September 2008 is recommended.

There is a need to arrange a follow-up meeting between July and September to provide update on progress in addressing issues raised by children and young people on 23 January and 13 February 2008.

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