

Policy and Performance - Families and Wellbeing Committee
Tuesday, 8 March 2016

REPORT TITLE:	Looked After Children Scrutiny Review - Progress regarding implementation of the recommendations
REPORT OF:	Director of Children's Services

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides a final progress update on the implementation of the Recommendations made in August 2013 relating to the Scrutiny Review of Outcomes for Looked After Children. A summarised update in respect of each recommendation is detailed at Appendix 1.

The Review obtained evidence directly from children in care and care leavers, council officers and partners. The Review focused on raising aspirations, the role of foster carers, the children's social care process, post 16 support, education, housing and 16+ employability. 21 Recommendations were made in total which have been incorporated into the Corporate Parenting Group Strategy Action Plan (April 2014 to March 2016) and therefore, formed a key part of the Group's work plan over the past 2 years.

An update report was provided to this Committee on the 2nd December 2014, which set out the historical context of the review including that it had been determined that the Corporate Parenting Group with its focus on outcomes for children in care and care leavers would take the lead on implementing the recommendations. The report also included a copy of the action plan.

In line with this oversight, the 21 Scrutiny Recommendations were integrated within the Corporate Parenting Strategy Action Plan and each recommendation was linked to one of the six existing Corporate Parenting Strategy objectives. This review will take each objective and report progress against the recommendations within it. Reference to Green means the action has been completed while reference to Amber means further work is still required and the action will be carried over to the Corporate Parenting Group Strategy Action Plan 2016 – 2018. There are no red actions, indicating that no progress has been made.

The Committee is asked to consider progress against each recommendation, noting actions that have been met and actions to be carried forward into the new action plan. The majority of recommendations have been completed and for those that have not, the foundations have been put in place to enable them to be met within the next Corporate Parenting Strategy Action Plan. The reorganisation of children's social care and in particular the creation of four Children Looked After teams affords a real opportunity to improve the quality of experience and life chances for children looked after and care leavers.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee notes the progress made to date and further planned actions/steps outlined in the Summary Update at Appendix 1 in relation to the Looked After Scrutiny Review Recommendations.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

To enable the Committee to comment on the progress made and make further recommendations, if required.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

None. As indicated above, this report provides an update on a Review previously undertaken by this Committee.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Background information is provided above and this report provides a progress update on the implementation of the Recommendations made in August 2013 relating to the Scrutiny Review of Outcomes for Looked After Children. The first progress update was provided in December 2014.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. The reorganisation within children's social care was costed within existing resources.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council and its partners have obligations as a Corporate Parent of children in its care. Progress with improving children and young people's outcomes are reported on and monitored through the Corporate Parenting Group, and the safeguarding framework provided by the Wirral Safeguarding Children's Board and also considered by external bodies such as Ofsted and the Local Government Ombudsman.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS

None.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

The Council is judged externally by Ofsted regarding outcomes for children looked after and care leavers and as part of this, considers how well the Council undertakes its Corporate Parenting responsibilities including the effectiveness of elected members at scrutinising children's services and partner's work.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

The Scrutiny Review obtained evidence directly from children in care and care leavers, council officers and partners. As part of the reorganisation within children's social care, young people were also consulted and their feedback used to inform the reorganisation design. The Children in Care Council continues to consult with young people and provide direct feedback on the Children's Services work and informs future areas of work.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

(a) Yes and impact review is attached – (*insert appropriate hyperlink*).

To find your departmental hyperlink click on:

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-2010-0>

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Summary Update

Appendix 2 – Scrutiny Report

REFERENCE MATERIAL

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	7 th November 2012
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	21 st January 2013
Families and Wellbeing Policy and Performance Committee	2 nd December 2014

SUMMARY UPDATE

Progress against Scrutiny Review Recommendations: -

Objective 1: Listen to children and young people and demonstrate that we have taken action to respond (incorporating Recommendation 1).

This recommends that raising the aspirations of children looked after (CLA) is central to the Corporate Parenting Groups decision making. Actions taken to achieve this included providing recruitment and selection training to the Children in Care Council (CICC), enabling them to be involved in the recruitment of social workers and social work managers including the Head of Service. The CICC has also completed a number of pieces of work including what makes a good care plan and an outstanding service, contributed to the development of a life skills programme for care leavers, contributed to the foster carer recruitment campaign and participated in an online tutorial for young people on how to make a complaint.

The Right Side of Care website was created in February 2015 enabling information to be shared with young people via the use of alternative mediums. The Council's commitment to listening to children looked after and acting on their wishes and feelings has been reinforced through the "Wirral Promise" being refreshed and signed up to by key Council leaders and partners. Strong links between the social work teams and 14-19 team have been instrumental in the continued increase of care leavers in Education, Employment and Training (EET). Furthermore, a programme is now in place working with a local university who host visits for our children looked after (CLA).

Progress against Recommendation 1: Green

Objective 2: Actions to support corporate parents in carrying out their responsibilities

There are no Scrutiny Recommendations within this Objective.

Objective 3: Actions to engage the rest of the Council in corporate parenting

There are no Scrutiny Recommendations within this Objective.

Objective 4: Being Healthy

There are no Scrutiny Recommendations within this Objective.

Objective 5: Staying Safe (incorporating Recommendations 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 23, 24, 25)

Foster Carer Training

Recommendation 2 concerns training given to foster carers to ensure they are supported, trained and skilled to meet the needs of all children looked after in foster care as per the Regulations and national minimum standards. Payments to foster carers have now been aligned to a requirement to attend training and participate in ongoing professional development. Audits of foster carer supervision files are ongoing and discussions are underway to integrate attendance at training sessions within this.

Progress against Recommendation 2: Green

Additional Support to Foster Carers

Recommendation 4 concerns additional support foster carers may need beyond the above training. Actions to achieve this include improvements in peer to peer support within the fostering service and annual reviews to capture the support carers both identify and receive. A connected carers support group, teenage carers support group and a support group for the children of foster carers are now in operation. A weekly drop in service is also provided to foster carers and a quarterly newsletter is provided by the fostering service.

Progress against Recommendation 4: Green

Transition for Young People Leaving Care

Recommendations 6 and 9 are to ensure the organisational structures both within Children's Social Care and specifically within transitions to the Pathway Team are clear and prioritise the needs of CLA. The introduction of a new operational structure within Children's Social Care including the integration of the Pathway Team into 4 newly created Children Looked After (CLA) teams took place in June 2015 and provides a seamless transition for children looked after as they become adults and means that a transfer to another team at age 16 no longer takes place. Young people told us that at age 16 they have enough to contend with and that transferring to a new team and social worker is an unnecessary disruption. We have been able to act on this.

Progress against Recommendations 6 and 9: Green

Accessible Information and Support

Recommendations 7, 10, 11 and 12 concern the provision of timely, accurate and accessible information and support to CLA. This includes enabling young people to access information concerning financial settlements (Recommendation 7), understanding the role of the Independent Visitors Service (Recommendation 11) and the support they offer and providing additional support to young people in care following their 18th birthday

(Recommendation 10). The 'Staying Put' policy and procedures have been updated and there is good evidence that more young people are remaining with their foster carers post 18. Changes to the payments policy are planned for 2016 to reflect this and ensure the scheme is sustainable. To ensure young people are aware of their financial entitlements, the 'Care Leavers Financial Policy' and 'Guide to Foster Carer Payments' have both been revised, with child friendly versions available and both will be reviewed annually.

Progress against Recommendations 7, 10 and 11: Green

Pathway Planning

Recommendation 12 outlines that CLA should understand what is contained within their Pathway Plan. A series of actions have been completed to address this including workshops to support the CLA teams to produce more outcome focussed plans. The quality of Pathway Plans is still variable though, further ongoing work is needed to skill up all members of the CLA teams to better capture young people's participation in their plans. A Service Development plan and individual team plans are in place setting out the required development work needed and additional interim social work capacity has been provided to ensure former relevant young people have up to date pathway plans. Care/Pathway Planning, performance reporting for care leavers and CLA and increasing Personal Adviser (PA) capacity have been identified as areas of ongoing work to be continued beyond the expiry of the Scrutiny Recommendations.

Progress against Recommendation 12: Amber

Suitable Accommodation for Young People Leaving Care

Recommendations 23, 24 and 25 are to ensure care leavers have access to suitable accommodation and their own tenancies. To achieve this, the Council's Housing Division and Children's Services worked collaboratively to analyse and review existing supported living accommodation. This resulted in the reconfiguration of existing supported living accommodation and the creation of smaller 24 hour staffed supported living accommodation for this group and also for 16/17 year olds who are homeless. In September 2015 a review led by an independent consultant considered how the range of accommodation options for care leavers could be broadened. This recommended streamlining the placement request process on Liquid Logic and increasing capacity within the contracts/commissioning section, both of which are being taken forward. Finally, care leavers are now involved in visits to supported living providers and have spoken with the young people there about the accommodation. A report concerning this was provided to the Corporate Parenting Group in January 2016.

Progress against Recommendations 23, 24 and 25: Green

Objective 6: Enjoying and achieving economic wellbeing (incorporating recommendations 3, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21)

This final group of Recommendations concerns preparing care leavers for further education, training and employment (Recommendations 18, 19 and 20), and increasing vocational and academic employment opportunities (Recommendation 21). This Objective advocates achieving this through the promotion of independent living skills and providing employment and training opportunities through placements (Recommendation 3), ensuring personal education plans are undertaken in line with Regulations (Recommendation 15) along with the development of stronger working relationships between schools and social workers (Recommendation 13). It encourages ensuring that support is in place to achieve this through making sure that the Personal Education Allowance (PEA) meets the identified needs of children looked after (Recommendation 17).

Supporting Care Leavers into Employment

Some actions linked to these Recommendations have achieved real success; dedicated personal coaches working with young people to engage them in vocational and academic programmes leading to employment have seen measures of EET at age 19 rising from 37% to 68% over a 4 year period. Ring-fenced places for care leavers on the 'Wirral Apprentice' programme led to 9 young people accessing this opportunity and to date 16 care leavers have accessed the Get Real programme. Further proposals are being taken forward to increase the number of internal apprenticeships and work experience opportunities for care leavers and was discussed at the December 2015 Corporate Parenting Group.

Educational Support for Children in Care

Education Progress Officers (EPO's) are now co-located with the CLA teams, improving communication between the service and social workers. The Liquid Logic children's system now enables PEP's to be completed on the system, which has streamlined the process and will shortly enable performance reports to be routinely run. This is being further enhanced from April 2016, with Designated Teachers in schools being given access to the system enabling them to complete their sections in Liquid Logic. Proposals have also been presented to the Corporate Parenting Group on progress officers spending more time tracking pupil performance rather than quality assuring PEP's, for instance, tracking all year 6 pupils entering secondary school. A further area of development is tracking progress linked to the Pupil Premium and holding schools to account for the money they receive for CLA. These areas of work will be carried over into the next Corporate Parenting Group Action Plan.

Requests for additional support via the PEA are made via the Group Manager for fostering and adoption who consults with the LACES team when agreeing requests. What is outstanding is the overall review of this funding and how it is making a difference to educational attainment/engagement for those young people receiving it.

The creation of the CLA teams affords a greater opportunity to develop closer links with schools and this work is ongoing.

Progress against Recommendations 3, 18, 19, 20, 21 Green

Progress against Recommendations 13, 15, 17, Amber