

Select Committee on Children's Services – 15 November 2007

Report of the Director of Children's Services

White Paper – Care Matters

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Committee of the key requirements of the White Paper Care Matters – Time For Change and to consider the implications for delivery of services to looked after children who are the responsibility of Dudley MBC.

Background

2. The White Paper published in June 2007 sets out an agenda for change to improve outcomes for children and young people in care.
3. The White Paper builds on responses to the Green Paper Care Matters – Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care and the conclusion of four working groups established to investigate best practice in supporting those in care. The consultation responses indicated that the Green Paper had been generally welcomed as the start of a long overdue focus on children in care and an opportunity to effect long term change.
4. The White Paper uses the term 'children in care' to include all children being looked after by a local authority including those subject to care orders and those looked after on a voluntary basis through an agreement with their parents.
5. The paper sets out the steps which authorities are required to take to improve the outcomes of children and young people in care and addresses the requirements under the following sections:
 - Corporate Parenting
 - Family and Parenting Support
 - Care Placements
 - Education

- Health and Well-Being
- Transition to Adulthood
- The Role of the Practitioner
- Next Steps

6. A summary of the main points of each chapter is included as Appendix 1.

Finance

7. The Government intends to provide additional resources to build capacity to implement the changes in the White Paper as follows: Additional resources of £13.5m in 2007/08 and £89/96/107m over the 2008/11 Comprehensive Spending Review period have been identified at a national level. On average, Dudley, benefit by 0.5% of the national funding budget. This would mean an additional annual budget of £0.5m from 2008/09 onwards. At this stage, the additional costs which arise as a result of the White Paper have not been costed, so it is difficult to identify how reasonable the additional annual funding of £0.5m will be in funding the objectives of the White Paper.
8. As part of the funding a Change Fund will be available in 2007/08 for local authorities who have audited their systems for children in care and those on the edge of care and identified their priorities for improvement.
9. Support will be offered for innovative proposals that are evidence based and clearly linked to improved outcomes for children and young people.
10. Good corporate parenting requires local authorities to take a longer term view on local budgets if change is to be imbedded and a 3-5 year strategy will be required to deliver improved cost effectiveness and underpin longer term shifts and priorities.

Law

11. Some of the proposals in the White Paper will require changes to the legislative and regulatory framework including statutory guidance and relevant minimum standards. The Government intends to review minimum standards and underpinning regulations for Children's Social Services made under the Care Standards Act 2000 and will consult on revisions to statutory guidance made under the Children Act 1989. It is anticipated that such proposals will be presented to Parliament in November 2007.

Equality Impact

12. Implementation of the requirements of Care Matters - Time for Change will contribute to improved outcomes for looked after children. It assists the Council in discharging its corporate parenting responsibilities to ensure that looked after children are not disadvantaged by being in care and that they are supported in their educational, emotional and social well-being.

Recommendations

13. It is recommended that:
14. The Committee notes the report and the implications of the White Paper Care Matters for Dudley.
15. The Committee recognises the Council's role in corporate parenting to children in care through the implementation of the recommendations of the White Paper.



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Briefing for Select Committee – 15 November 2007

White Paper Care Matters – Time for Change

This briefing provides a summary of the key points and recommendations from each chapter in the White Paper.

Chapter 1: Corporate Parenting

This chapter emphasizes the importance of building secure attachments with consistent carers and positive experiences for children in care to allow them to develop the resilience they need in life.

The White Paper makes clear that the Director of Children's Services and Cabinet Member for Children should be responsible for leading improvement in corporate parenting. The other main features of this chapter are:

- A pledge to children in care
- A children in care council
- Consolidation of care planning arrangements
- Dissemination of corporate parenting training materials
- Annual stock take of outcomes for children in care
- Three year inspection of how local authorities are improving outcomes for children in care

Chapter 2: Family and Parenting Support

The White Paper states the principle that wherever possible children should be supported in their own families. The chapter draws on the findings of the working groups which considered the future of the care population and stresses the importance of authorities analysing the profile of their children in care to ensure that appropriate services are delivered.

A number of proposals are made to provide support for families and parents and to ensure that Children's Services work with birth parents while the child is in care to effect a safe return home wherever possible. Other proposals include:

- Family Group Conferencing
- Provision of short breaks for parents with disabled children
- A new frame work for family and friends care
- Development of multi-systemic therapy as an effective intervention for older children

Chapter 3: Care Placements

Children in care have indicated that being in the right placement is what makes the single biggest difference to their lives. The White Paper states that all placement decisions should be made with a view to maximising an opportunity for the children to find permanence. A range of measures are proposed to improve the quality of placements for children in care:

- A statutory duty on local authorities to secure a sufficient and diverse provision of quality placement within their local area
- Improved commissioning of placements with regional commissioning units
- Statutory framework for out of authority placements will be strengthened
- Foster care recruitment campaigns will be supported
- Revision of national standards in foster and residential care
- Explicit requirements for children in care to be visited by their social worker
- Improve provision for disabled children in long term residential placements
- Development of social pedagogy
- Improved provision for arrangements for children missing from care

Chapter 4: Education

A high quality education provides the foundation for transforming the lives of children in care is the open statement in this, the longest chapter in the White Paper. The key proposals are:

- Children in care should be given the highest priority in school admission arrangements and under the Education Inspection Act 2006 local authorities have the power to direct schools to admit children in care even where the school is already fully subscribed
- Requirements for local authorities to ensure that care planning decisions do not disrupt a child's education
- Looked After Children must not move schools in years 10 and 11 except in exceptional circumstances
- The role of the designated teacher will be statutory
- Provision of one-to-one tutoring of children in care
- Establishment of a headteacher to a virtual school
- £500 a year for each child in care at risk of not achieving the expected standards to support their education
- High quality early years provision for children in care under 5 years of age

Chapter 5: Health and Well-Being

This chapter stresses an holistic approach to improving the health needs of children in care addressing a wide variety of factors including participating in positive leisure activities. Key recommendations are:

- Statutory guidance to ensure Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services provide targeted and dedicated provision that appropriately prioritises children in care

- New standards of support for pregnant young women and moms in care and leaving care
- Named health professionals for all children in care
- New indicator of emotional behaviour difficulties of children in care
- New responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services to ensure that children and young people in care participate equally in positive activities along with their peers

Chapter 6: Transition to Adulthood

In recognition of the fact that young people in care often have a difficult move to adulthood this chapter focuses on ensuring that when leaving care they have the skills necessary for them to cope on their own. The Government is piloting the involvement of young people in the decision making process that influences their care. In addition:

- Local authorities will be prevented from moving young people prematurely from their care placements
- Proposals to extend the role of personal adviser up to the age of 25 for care leavers in education.
- Pilot new ways to enable young people to stay in foster care up to 21
- National bursary of £2,000 for all young people in care who go on to higher education.
- From 2008 the Government will invest £100 per year in the Child Trust Fund of every child who spends the year in care
- Employment opportunities should be explicit within the Pledge

Chapter 7: The Role of the Practitioner

The day-to-day experience of the corporate parent is embodied for a child in care by the work of the social work practitioner. This chapter therefore covers workforce remodelling and the recruitment, retention and training of social workers. The specific focus on social workers includes:

- Additional funding for investment of I.T.
- Improved training
- Newly qualified social worker status to ensure support
- Tailored recruitment campaigns
- Strengthening the role of the Independent Reviewing Officers

One of the most controversial proposals is piloting of social work practices over the next 2 years.

Chapter 8: Next Steps

Some of the proposals in the White Paper will require changes to the legislative and regulatory framework including statutory guidance and relevant minimum standards. The final chapter indicates that a detailed implementation plan will be published later in 2007.

The chapter describes the Government's ambition for local authorities to work in partnership with the voluntary sector and outlines the role that the private sector can play.

Additional funding will be provided - £13m in 2007/8 and £89m, £96m and £107m in successive years during the 2008-11 Comprehensive Spending Review period. This includes a change fund for local authorities which have audited their systems for supporting children in care and those on the edge of care and identified their priorities for improvement.