

Select Committee on Children's Services - 14 September 2009

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Annual report on outcomes for Looked After Children

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Select Committee of the Council's performance in discharging its corporate parenting responsibilities for children in care.
2. To inform Select Committee of the key comparator outcomes for Looked After Children. (See Appendix 1)
3. To inform Select Committee of key developments for Looked After Children.

Background

4. Children become looked after when they are accommodated by the Local Authority on a voluntary agreement with the family or they are subject to care orders as a result of court direction because they are suffering or likely suffering from significant harm.
5. When a child enters care the state takes on a huge responsibility for those children by agreeing to undertake the parental role on a day to day basis. That means that all those working for the state at a local level – every Councillor, Director of Children's Services, Social Worker or teacher should demand no less for each child in care than they would for their own child. This is the essence of corporate parenting.
6. Historically outcomes for children in care have been poor and whilst there has been some improvement in recent years there is still a significant and unacceptable gap on those outcomes than those for all children.
7. The White Paper published in June 2007 set out an agenda for change to improve outcomes for children and young people in care. It built 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.

8. The paper set out the steps which authorities are required to take to improve the outcomes of children and young people in care and addressed 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
9. In November 2008 The Children and Young People’s Act received royal assent and provided the underpinning legislation for the practice and policy directives of the White Paper
10. It is the strategy of the Children’s Trust to provide services to support families to avoid the need for children to become looked after but where this becomes necessary it is incumbent on the Local Authority acting as the corporate parent to ensure that the care experience is a positive one, that we have high aspirations for children in our care and that we provide the support and services required to improve outcomes for them. They are in fact our children and we should not compound their previous childhood experiences by providing poor standards of care and support.
11. The Director of Children’s Services and Cabinet Member both have roles set out in statutory guidance for discharging their responsibilities as corporate parents for children in care and ensuring that they are prioritised across Children’s Services.
12. Children in care have been identified as a priority group within the Children and Young People’s Plan
13. The Council is currently looking after 588 children. This has been a rising trend over a number of years and there has been a significant rise since the Baby Peter case in Haringey. This reflects a national trend with many authorities with previously stable looked after numbers showing significant rises.

Finance

14. The Government has provided additional resources via the Care Matters Area Based Grant to build capacity to implement the changes in the White paper. The following allocations have been made to Dudley.

Year	£
2007-08	17,000
2008-09	245,000
2009-10	316,000
2010-11	356,000
Total	934,000

However, as part of the budget strategy the funding available in 2009-10 has remained the same as 2008-09.

Law

15. The legislation and guidance which relates both generally and specifically to looked after children and care leavers is:
- Children Act 1989
 - Children Leaving Care Act 2000
 - Adoption and Children Act 2002
 - Children Act 2004
 - Care Matters Time for Change 2007
 - Children and Young People's Act 2008.

Equality Impact

16. 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

17. That Select Committee receives the Annual Report on Children in Care.
18. That Select Committee recognises the Council's role in corporate parenting to children in care, comments on performance and identifies areas for further scrutiny through the Working Group on Safeguarding and Social Care.



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