

BOROUGH OF POOLE

COUNCIL

17TH JUNE 2008

ANNUAL CORPORATE PARENTING REPORT
CHILDREN IN CARE: REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR
SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To advise Members of their 'corporate parenting' responsibilities and governance arrangements in relation to children in care.
- 1.2 To inform Members of service developments and improvements for children in care.
- 1.3 To inform Members of key performance data and outcomes for children in care in the Borough of Poole.

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 That Members note the performance data within the Report.
- 2.2 That a performance report on children in care is presented to Council on an annual basis.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The term 'corporate parenting' refers to the responsibility and duties which the Council as a whole has for providing the best possible services and support for children who are in the care of the local authority.

The expectation of a good 'corporate parent' is that they provide the level of support and guidance, in all its various forms that any good parent would give to their own child in order to achieve a healthy and happy childhood and the best possible start in life.

4. **CORPORATE PARENTING RESPONSIBILITIES AND GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS**

- 4.1 The publication of the White Paper, "Care Matters: Time for Change 2007" has provided a key framework for delivery of improvement and change around services for children in care.

The impetus for a renewed focus on corporate parenting is the recognition that outcomes for children in care, during childhood and into adulthood, continue to be poor, with for example significantly worse educational achievements, more likelihood of being homeless, unemployed, convicted of criminal offences, in custody or a teenage parent.

“The reasons for children being in care, such as parental abuse, neglect or abandonment will have already placed them at a disadvantage. It is essential that their experiences in public care compensate for this disadvantage rather than compound it. Their corporate parents should be their champions in the fight to get them what they need – and to make sure they are safe”.

Ref. National Children’s Bureau – Handbook for Councillors – Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice 2008.

- 4.2 Care Matters builds on the Every Child Matters for initiative established by the Children Act 2004 in order to improve inter-agency collaboration and accountability within Children’s Services. Within this emphasis on improved outcomes for all children, in 5 key areas, Care Matters recognises the particular needs of children in care. The specific components of an effective local corporate parenting framework within the Borough of Poole to deliver improved outcomes include:-

Children Trust arrangements – responsibility for children in care extends beyond local authority services. Health trusts, Connexions and Police have an active role locally in ensuring that partnership arrangements support good outcomes for children in care. Responsibility for oversight of this is undertaken via the Children’s Services Governance Board.

Children and Young People’s Plan – the Plan is a statutory requirement for all local authorities. Poole’s Plan specifically address the needs of children in care in one of the six overarching objectives of the Plan.

”provide stable and secure placements for children in care”

Children in Care Pledge – Care Matters requires each local authority to develop a pledge for children in care setting out their statutory entitlements, opportunities and support.

The Council endorsed the Borough’s first pledge or Charter in 2005 and this is now in the process of review and revision.

Children Care Forum – a young people’s group network which supports consultation and participation of young people.

Corporate Parenting Group - a formal member/officer group meets quarterly and has responsibility for overall oversight of all areas of service delivery, resources and performance for children in care.

Care Matters Action Plan – the key delivery plan for all service performance and improvement for children in care and is managed by an Officers' Care Matters Partnership Group.

The Governance Framework for Corporate Parenting within the Borough of Poole is attached.

(Appendix 1)

4.3 In developing an effective approach to corporate parenting National Guidance identifies three levels of responsibility:-

- Universal responsibility (level 1) all elected members, local authority managers and partner agencies at senior level.
- Targeted responsibility (level 2) – elected members within the Corporate Parenting Group and managers within Children's Services.
- Specialist responsibility (level 3) – lead member for Children's Services and Directors of Children's Services, Head of Children and Young People's Social Care.

4.4 Within Level 1 - Universal responsibility i.e. that relating to elected members the minimum expectation is that individuals should:-

- Be aware of the corporate parenting role and the shared responsibility for ensuring that the needs of looked after children and care leavers are met.
- Have some knowledge of the profile and needs of the children their authority looks after and how these may be changing.
- Understand the impact on looked after children of all council decisions.
- Receive information about the quality of care and the quality of services that children are experiencing.
- Consider whether this would be good enough for their child.
- Ensure that action is being taken to address any shortcomings in the service and to constantly improve the outcomes for looked after children.

4.5 Poole's Joint Area Review Report published April 2008 identified the under development of the Corporate Parenting function as a weakness. Actions are currently being formulated to address this area with reference to the expectations listed above.

5. KEY PERFORMANCE DATA AND OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

5.1 The quality of service and outcomes for children in care is measured in a number of ways.

- External Inspection – OFSTED Joint Area Review and OFSTED Inspections of Fostering and Adoption Services.
- Management Information including National Performance Indicators.

5.2 **OFSTED JAR and Fostering Service Inspections**

A Joint Area Review Inspection of Poole Local Authority Children's Services was undertaken by OFSTED in December 2007 and final Report published in April 2008. Children in Care constitutes one of the five key areas for inspection and the relevant section of the JAR Report is attached (Appendix 2). *In summary the overall judgement for children in care was 'good'. Key strengths identified include:-*

- Good investment in multi-agency preventative services to reduce the need for public care.
- Good outcomes for most children in care with particularly good health and education outcomes.
- Good education support and partnership working with schools.
- Good quality planning for individual children and young people which ensures their consistent participation.

Areas for development are:-

- Improve stability of placements and availability of placements for children with complex needs.
- Further development of corporate parenting functions.

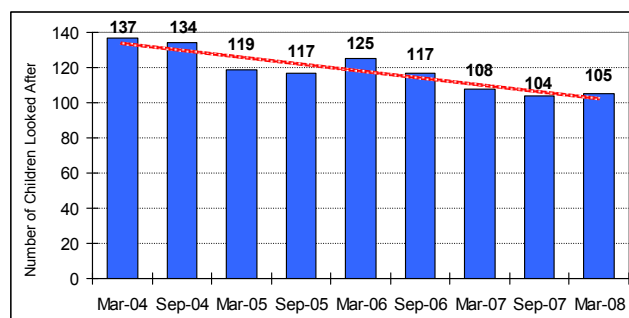
A Statutory Inspection of Fostering Services is undertaken annually. The Inspection undertaken in February 2008 (Report published March 2008) judged the Fostering Service 'as good' in all areas of the Joint Area Review. Extract from Summary Inspection Report

"The Borough of Poole Fostering Service demonstrates good outcomes for children and young people in foster placements. There is a strong emphasis for ensuring that foster placements are suitable, safe and fulfilling.

..... Robust management systems are in place to demonstrate the effectiveness of how young people, foster carers and staff are supported".

5.3 Performance Management Information for children in care

i) Profile of children in care



The above chart shows the number of children in care from March 2004 to March 2008. After large decreases the numbers of children in care has stabilised at approximately 105, a figure significantly below the national average, which demonstrates effective preventative and family support services.

The percentage of BME children in March 2008 is 10%. 2001 Census figures showed 3% of children in Poole to be from BME groups. There has been an increase in the number of children in Poole from BME groups since 2001, but the 10% Children In Care figure is high in comparison. At March 2008, there were 16 children in care with complex disabilities.

The age profile of children in care at March 2008 is as follows:-

Age	Children in Care	
Under 1 year	5	5%
1-4 years	10	10%
5-9 years	18	17%
10-15 years	49	47%
16-17 years	23	22%

ii) National Performance Indicators

There are a range of Government Key Performance Indicators for Children in Care. Local Authority performance is 'banded' nationally against particular targets and comparisons are also available against Poole's 'benchmarking' group of local authorities. Local data on a number of areas is also available and adds to our overall understanding of children in care outcomes. The performance targets form part of the Annual Performance Assessment (APA) for Children's Services nationally.

The key headlines for each area of performance are set out below with detailed statistical data attached (Appendix 3).

Placement Stability – Short-term placement stability (children who have three or more placements in one year) is very good. Long-term stability, measured over a 2-year period, continues to be the main area of underperformance, amongst all CIC indicators. Long-term stability performance is known to be particularly volatile in local authorities with small numbers of children in care, however additional factors which influence this area are:-

- the effectiveness of care planning
- lengthy court case proceedings
- the availability of local foster placements for young people with complex needs.
- the provision of intensive support to challenging placements.

Local actions have been identified in relation to all these areas and close scrutiny of long-term stability performance is undertaken. Performance in 07/08 improved slightly from 56.4% to 58.1%.

This national indicator is included as part of Poole's Local Area Agreement and targets for the next three years have been set.

Education – Key education outcomes for children in care are measured by:-

School attendance – Poole is consistently above average in this area.

Exam results – Poole results for young people achieving 5+ Grades at A* - C are above the national average at 33%. Poole performs particularly well for children achieving 5 good (A* - C) passes. Details of Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 results are also included in Appendix 2.

Due to the very small school year cohorts in Poole, % results data is prone to significant swings between years and figures should be read with some caution therefore.

GCSE results for Care Leavers – Poole is above average for this key indicator – young people who left care aged 16 years or older with one or more GCSE pass. The indicator counts young people regardless of the length of time in care prior to exams or whether or not they were in care when they sat the exam.

Poole's overall profile of a high % exam success rate for young people who have been in care for a significant length of time indicates good quality and effective individual education support from the education support team, schools and foster carers.

Health - quantitative outcomes are measured by the percentage of up to date health and dental checks and immunisations and Poole is consistently above average in this area.

Statutory Reviews – it is a legal requirement for children in care to have a review of their progress every 6 months. Reviews are chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer not directly involved in the young person's care. In Poole nearly all reviews are held on time and the participation of young people in their reviews is consistently above national average.

Offending – offending by children in care is consistently below the national average. In Poole in 07/08, 4 young people in care were cautioned or convicted of an offence.

Care Leavers – outcomes for Care Leavers are an important measure of the quality of support to young people during the critical period of transition to adulthood. Poole's performance is particularly strong in this area with 100% of care leavers in suitable accommodation and in contact with the Care Leavers Service, and a percentage of care leavers in education, training or employment equal to that of the local population.

In overall summary Poole has achieved above average outcomes in all key performance areas with the exception of long-term placement stability.

6. SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

- 6.1 In addition to the performance data summarised above, monitoring of service provision and developments, multi-agency working and the views of children and young people in care provides an additional understanding of the quality of care and services that children and young people are experiencing.

6.2 **Placement Support**

Poole has consistently had a high % of children in local foster placements. At March 2008, 71% were in local authority foster care. A high proportion of children in care with complex disabilities are in stable long term foster placements, working alongside an excellent shared care service providing a range of respite care arrangements. Poole's foster carers provide high quality care and receive good support from a range of professionals and a comprehensive training programme, including NVQ.

A small number of placements are made with Independent Fostering Agency (IFA's) or in residential units where in-house capacity is not able to meet particular individual complex needs. Quality assurance of these placements is particularly crucial and this is provided via a formal

commissioning process with service specifications, external OFSTED inspections, statutory reviews ,visits to units by staff at regular intervals and the use of Poole's Independent Advocacy Service.

Service developments include:-

- additional member of staff appointed in order to strengthen 'arms length' review and quality assurance of foster carers
- additional clinical psychology time to support foster carers.
- access to a beach hut for Poole foster carers.

6.3 **Education and Leisure**

In line with Care Matters requirements Poole has a part time Virtual Head Teacher who has a key responsibility for education achievement. The education support team comprising educational psychologist, education welfare officer and teacher works closely with social workers to provide and deliver an education Personal Education Plan for every child in care. Each school has a designated teacher for children in care and specific training is undertaken for designated teachers and governors in order to strengthen roles and responsibilities. Specific arrangements are in place in relation to school admissions for children in care and for responding to a small number of fixed term exclusions. There have been no permanent exclusions of looked after children during the past 5 years. All children in care have Access to Leisure cards and individuals participate in a wide range of sporting and leisure activities. An Awards Ceremony to celebrate the life achievements for children in care is held annually.

Service developments:-

- introduction of personal education allowance for children in care most at risk of underachieving.
- early reading project for younger age range in conjunction with libraries.
- all foster homes have computers provided to support home learning.
- homework club for children in care.

6.4 **Health**

Foster carers are well supported to ensure that the physical and emotional health needs of children in care are met. A full time CIC health visitor, mainly funded by the PCT, co-ordinates health assessments, emotional health screening and provides comprehensive advice, individual support and group work around all aspects of health e.g. fitness, lifestyle, sexual health, substance misuse. This area of work received particular recognition in Poole's Joint Area Review. Dedicated support is also provided by Child and Adolescent Mental

Health (CAMHS) staff for children in care. There is good access to all appropriate specialist health services for children in care with disabilities.

Poole has audited all aspects of health provision against the national standards as part of the Government Sponsored National Healthy Care Programme.

Service developments:-

- healthy eating and cooking groups and netball club for children in care.
- introduction of individual 'health passport' with key personal health record information.

6.5 Care Leavers

Under the Care Leavers Act 2000 the Local Authority has a range of responsibilities to young people who are or have been in care, up to the age of 21 years dependent upon individual circumstances. Provision for 16 years plus has been a particular focus of Care Matters, in recognition of evidence of failures nationally of local authorities to properly support young people into adulthood in the way that any good parent would.

The Pathways team within Children and Young People's Social Care provide services for this group. Staffing includes social workers, health visitor, accommodation officer, unaccompanied asylum seeking children support worker. Good partnership working exists with Poole Housing Services, Connexions and CAMHS, In order to ensure suitable accommodation an agreement is in place which provides 10% of single occupancy housing stock to young people in care.

Service developments:-

- Work Placement Project for young people in care working within sections of the council.
- Development proposal for independence training flat.

6.6 The views of children and young people

A continuous process for listening to and responding to the views and experiences of children in care is the core of delivering responsive and effective services. Poole has developed a number of ways of achieving this e.g. consultation events - young people's groups, 'Total Respect' training for staff and members delivered by young people. Small numbers in care in Poole does create problems of sustainability. The Advocacy Service delivered via NCH provides an independent support and voice around particular issues and concerns. Views and

experiences are articulated via the Young People's Charter which is currently under review.

Service developments:-

- Proposed appointment of a 'care experienced' young person as participation worker to promote and develop new ways of participation and consultation.

7. SUMMARY

- 7.1 In summary Poole provides strong and high quality services to children in care as evidenced by key performance indicators, recent inspection reports and the views of children and young people. Two areas require particular attention, these are long term placement stability and further development of corporate parenting. Specific actions are in place to address this including regular annual reporting to all elected members on the quality of services to children in care.

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Background Papers

Borough Of Poole Children and Young Peoples Plan 2006-9
White Paper - Care Matters: Time for Change 2007
National Childrens Bureau - Corporate Parenting - Handbook for Councillors