

Report to: **Social Services & Health Scrutiny Committee**

Date: **25 September 2003**

By: **Directors of Social Services and Education**

Title of report: **Progress Report on Action Plan resulting from Best Value Review of Children in Public Care**

Purpose of report: **To advise the Committee of progress on the Action Plan**

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

Note the contents of the report.

1. Financial Appraisal

- 1.1 All actions resulting from the recommendations of the Best Value Review of Children in Public Care will be contained within the Social Services base budget and special grants.

2. Background Information

- 2.1 The Best Value Review of Children in Public care was carried out between June – September 2002. The report and service response was presented to Cabinet on 30 January 2003. Cabinet welcomed the main recommendations and approved the joint response of the Directors of Social Services and Education.
- 2.2 A report, outlining progress on the actions undertaken in response to the main recommendations of the review report, was presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel on 24 July 2003 in line with Recommendation 21 and now contains comments made by members of the panel.

3. Panel Comments

- 3.1 In terms of progress, minutes of Panel state, "The Panel noted that there had been considerable progress on several of the recommendations made by the Best Value Review and in particular progress had been made in improved contracting arrangements, the establishment of designated nurses for looked after children, arrangements with CAMHS about the use of CAMHS Grant to provide specialist services to looked after children and availability of additional support for young people in Years 10 and 11 to maximise their potential for attainment at GCSE."
- 3.2 In respect of ongoing challenges, minutes of Panel state, "The Panel also noted that the key challenges facing the Council were finalising the strategy for residential care, maintaining progress in the recruitment and retention of foster carers and enabling looked after children to maximise their potential educationally."
- 3.3 The Panel resolved to note the report and ask that the Director of Social Services incorporate their comments into the report to the Scrutiny Committee for Social Services and Health on 25 September 2003.

Agenda Item

3. Summary

The Service is on target for implementing the main recommendations of the Best Value Review of Children in Public Care.

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Best Value Review: Children in Public Care 10 December 2002

No	Recommendation:	Target date	Progress	Comment by Corporate Parenting Panel
1.	<p>The County Council should approach the Chief Executives of District and Borough Councils to discuss how to secure preferential access for children and young people in care to sporting, leisure and cultural activities. District Councils should be asked to consider providing family cards for foster carers that will allow free access to facilities to foster children and their own children.</p>	<p>April 2003</p>	<p>All Councils have been written to and some discussions have taken place to discuss the possibility of foster carers, the looked after children in their care and their own children to have preferential access to leisure and recreational facilities. The response of both elected members and officers has been positive. Negotiations are underway about the best way forward. It is likely that foster carers will be issued with identity cards to gain preferential access. Independent providers of leisure and recreational services are also being approached.</p>	
2.	<p>The County Council should corporately scope the size of the problem of children placed by other local authorities in East Sussex. The County Council should then make representations to local MPs and through the Local Government Association to national government to:</p> <p>a) make statutory provision to ensure the complex needs of looked after children placed in the county by other local authorities are properly planned for prior to placements being made;</p> <p>b) and, if numbers are significant, ensure that funding to meet the child's needs follows the child.</p>	<p>April 2003</p>	<p>An audit was undertaken in April 2003 of looked after children placed by other local authorities in East Sussex. At that time there were just 136 such children; 70 x 0-11 year olds and 66 x 12+ year olds. 25 children are placed by Brighton & Hove, 15 from neighbouring County Councils and around 60 from the full range of London Boroughs. In all, the audit shows that 45 other local authorities place children in East Sussex. This is not seen as a significant number warranting further action.</p>	<p>Panel agreed that it would be useful to receive a demonstration of the system which is in place to inform Social Services that a child from outside East Sussex has been placed. The Panel agreed to receive a demonstration of the system at their next meeting in October 2003 (24.7.03).</p>

No	Recommendation:	Target date	Progress	Comment by Corporate Parenting Panel
3.	<p>A named Officer should be identified from within the existing resources of Education and Social Services and with links to Health to respond corporately to other local authorities placing children in East Sussex and to ensure that information about these children is quickly and properly disseminated.</p>	<p>April 2003</p>	<p>Other local authorities have a duty to notify the Council of looked after children placed by them in East Sussex. This is notified to the Director of Social Services and disseminated to the Children's Services. The details of children are entered onto the client data bases of Social Services and Education. Appropriate services in line with the needs of those children are identified through normal care and education planning.</p>	
4.	<p>The Social Services Department should improve its capacity to plan new services for children by better statistical information and analysis of the needs of its service users and the effectiveness of different services. An audit planning tool, such as "Matching Needs and Services" from the Dartington Social Research Unit, should be used in conjunction with Education and Health to audit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the requirement for residential provision for looked after children b) the requirement for other services for looked after children. 	<p>April 2003 Sept. 2003 (2004)</p>	<p>The Council's own statistical information on the needs of children at risk of family breakdown and care is being analyzed to design more appropriate residential services and other services for looked after children. This is being done in conjunction with national research on the needs of children in public care. A report on the strategy for the children's residential service, based upon focused analysis of children admitted into residential care over the past three years, was presented to the Children's Divisional Management Team in June 2003. This will form the basis of a project plan to modernise the Service in line with the needs of looked after children.</p>	
5.	<p>Joint planning arrangements for children in public care, or who are at risk of coming into care, should be re-established with Education and Health. These arrangements should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) plan local provision to minimize the need for agency placements; b) monitor and review agency placements; and c) be chaired by an independent person. 	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>The multi-agency commissioning panel (MAC) has been re-established to consider children coming into care who's needs cannot be met through directly managed services. The panel is chaired by John Tovey, Head of Children's Specialist Services, and attended by officers from Social Services and Education. Agreement was reached in June 2003 to include a health representative to ensure tri-partite commissioning and review. The panel reviews joint funded placements.</p>	

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8.	<p>The two units at Lansdowne should be separated as proposed in the Joint Review. The secure unit should be re-provisioned and improved on the existing site and the residential unit should be relocated to less institutional premises. It is recommended that a feasibility study should be undertaken to inform the Cabinet's consideration of this against other County priorities, but the Board recommends that this step should be regarded as not only necessary but likely to be cost effective in the medium term.</p>	<p>Proposals by March 2003</p> <p>(Sept. 03)</p>	<p>A children's mainstream residential strategy has been drawn up with detailed proposals to develop a new (ten bed) secure unit on the Lansdowne site. Negotiations are underway with the Department of Health to secure capital funding. It is proposed that the two eight bed open units will be re-provided as a two bed emergency admission unit, a four/five bed short-term unit and three four/five bed medium/long-term units. These proposals reflect the government agenda and best value review report to develop smaller, domestic style group homes. The revenue arrangements underpinning the strategy to modernize the service will be contained within the base budget and increased surplus from the secure accommodation.</p>	<p>The Panel requested that further information should be submitted to their next meeting in October 2003 (24.7.03).</p>
9.	<p>Consideration should be given together with Health and Education to the need for local residential provision for some groups of disabled children who are in public care.</p>	<p>Sept. 2003</p>	<p>A review of existing placements is taking place (see Rec 6(l) above) which will examine the potential for local provision of residential services for disabled children who are in public care. If this review establishes sufficient numbers of children whose needs can be met in the same provision, discussions with potential interested parties may commence.</p> <p>It should be noted that almost all residential provision for disabled children who are looked after, is delivered through placement in a residential school.</p> <p>Proposed changes to statements of educational need, (which identify current provision) will require sensitive discussions with the child/young person and her/his parents or carers.</p>	

No	Recommendation:	Target date	Progress	Comment by Corporate Parenting Panel
10.	A more dynamic model of residential care should be developed with better planning of admissions and moving on so that children have a proper sense of progression (links to recommendation 3.11)	April 2003	The Service response to this recommendation is contained in the mainstream children's residential strategy to develop smaller group homes with clear role and function to respond to the needs of those looked after children for whom residential care is the preferred care option.	
11.	Increased resources should be directed towards the fostering Service in 2003-04 to provide additional support packages for foster carers including easily accessible advice and support at all times; increased activities in school holidays; more flexible respite; help with transport and an acknowledgement of the needs of foster carers' own children. This could helpfully be supplemented by efficiency savings identified in the Review (see Rec. 3.19).	April 2003	A further investment of £300,000 was made in the Fostering Service in 2003/04, including the specific Choice Protects Grant, to increase allowances above the rate of inflation and to develop additional support packages. Funds have been identified for more holiday activities, regular respite care, support to ensure schooling, advice with behaviour management, psychological assessment and treatments, support to carers facing allegations and placement support activities.	

No	Action to be taken	Target date	Progress	Comment by Corporate Parenting Panel
12.	<p>The payment structure for foster carers should be reviewed in light of the need to recruit and retain – specialist foster carers for children with complex needs; mother and child placements; placements for children from ethnic minorities and carers working in an integrated manner with the residential units to move troubled adolescents into family placements.</p>	<p>April 2003 (Sept 03)</p>	<p>1. A comprehensive review of foster carer allowances is underway in consultation with the Foster Care Association and carers. This review is being undertaken in light of a number of developments, including the government review of fostering, Choice Protects, competition from independent fostering agencies and changes in the payment structure of neighbouring authorities.</p> <p>2. The first phase of the review has been completed, establishing a universal childcare allowance for all carers, based on the rates recommended by the National Foster Care Association for specific age groups, with a fee element for stranger carers to meet costs of caring for children with specific needs and to prevent hardship.</p> <p>3. The new recruitment campaign is targeting carers for children with complex needs, adolescents and mother and babies.</p>	

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13.	<p>Foster carers entitlements should be clarified by:</p> <p>a) re-writing the Foster Carers Handbook;</p> <p>b) the continuation/provision of support if carers are the subject of child protection investigations;</p> <p>c) a greater appreciation of their work by children's social workers and Members of the County Council;</p> <p>d) clear targets for assessment and approval times.</p>	<p>April 2003</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The foster carers handbook is being produced in consultation with staff, carers and other agencies. 2. Additional support for carers facing complaints has been put in place, in partnership with the Foster Care Association. 3. A programme of celebratory and 'thank you' events have been put in place. Those held to date have received a very positive response from carers. 4. The Fostering Service Business Plan and individual PDS targets now contain clear expectations of workloads, including number of assessments and length of time taken to complete assessments. 	<p>The Panel agreed that as members of the Corporate Parenting Panel they should routinely attend events on behalf of members of the County Council. It was also agreed that in future it would be helpful to publicise the fact that members have attended events (24.7.03).</p>
14.	<p>The Looked After Children Adviser and The Educational Support Team (TEST) should continue to support and challenge schools regarding educational issues for children and young people in care to raise their levels of educational attainment and promote inclusion. Successful systems elsewhere should be investigated by the Looked After Children Advisor to see what can be learnt from them.</p>	<p>Sept 2003</p>	<p>The Educational Support Team (TEST) continues to support the school attendance and attainment of looked after children, drawing from examples of best practice. Funds have been made available to provide additional support and home tuition for young people approaching GCSE exams.</p>	<p>The Panel requested that further information should be submitted to the next meeting in October 2003 concerning the Strategic Planning and Monitoring Groups (24.7.03).</p>

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15.	<p>The Local Education Authority through The Education Support Team should seek the agreement of Governors to ensure that all staff in schools are aware of the additional educational needs of looked after children and the importance of Personal Education Plans being in place.</p>	<p>Jan 2003</p>	<p>The TEST Team have produced a handbook for designated looked after children teachers in every school to increase the completion of personal education plans and to help raise the additional needs of looked after children within the school.</p>	
16.	<p>New schemes should be explored by the Leaving Care Service in conjunction with Connexions Sussex to ensure that alternative training and employment opportunities are available to young people in public care.</p>	<p>Sept 2003</p>	<p>Close co-operation between the Care Leavers Service and Connexions Sussex is focussed on appropriate education, further education, employment and training opportunities for children in public care.</p> <p>Where necessary, a specific 'pre-employment scheme' is established focussed upon young people who may be care leavers; known to the Youth Offending Team or the Under 19's Substance Misuse Service.</p> <p>This is to acknowledge that some young people need additional preparation and support to access education, training or employment.</p>	

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17.	<p>a) Social Services, in association with the PCTs, to establish, with the East Sussex County Health Care Trust, a screening service for children in care, or at risk of admission to care, because of emotional and behavioural problems.</p> <p>b) The recommended model is a nurse-led service, with access to the multi-disciplinary team in CAMHS, which</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • visits families and foster families • makes preliminary assessments and offers advice on behaviour management • prioritises referrals to consultants and other professionals. 	<p>April 2003 (April 04)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An action plan has been drawn up to implement the new guidance for meeting the health needs of looked after children in consultation with the joint Children's Commission Manager for the local PCT's. PCT's are in the process of identifying designated looked after children nurses and new systems are in place to notify designated nurses of admissions, placement moves and reviews in order to ensure health assessments and plans. 2. Agreement has been reached with the CAMHS Service to appoint two dedicated looked after children psychologists/psychotherapists and a small purchasing budget with the aim of supporting placement stability and preparing children for permanence through focussed assessments and treatment plans. Their work will include consultation and support to carers. 	
18.	<p>All Primary Care Trusts should be encouraged to develop the role of the Designated Nurse for looked after children so that all aspects of the health care of looked after children can be monitored and improved.</p>	<p>April 2003</p>	<p>The role of designated looked after children nurses has been established and new systems are in place to notify them of the admission, placement move and review of all looked after children to ensure up-to-date health assessments and effective health plans.</p>	

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19.	<p>Current strategies adopted by the Social Services Department to prevent children going into agency placements should continue and the Department should plan to identify 2% efficiency savings (calculated by the Board at between £90,000 and £130,000) mainly from the agency placements budget. These efficiency savings should be used to balance additional spending in the in-house services and should be realized on a phased basis as:</p> <p>(a) elimination of overspend on agency budget</p> <p>(b) between £90,000 and £130,000 to be shifted from agency to fostering and other in-house budgets (see paras 4.11.8)</p> <p>(c) monitoring to be undertaken of the stability of social work staff working with Looked After Children.</p>	<p>April 2004</p> <p>April 2005</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>1. The strategy to recruit and retain carers is continuing with the aim to reduce the use of agency placements and the overspend on the agency budget. Any savings will be used to develop and improve directly managed services.</p> <p>2. The recruitment and retention of staff remains a priority for the Division and current vacancy levels in fieldwork teams are low, which reduces the need for changes of key worker for children. Maintenance of the same key worker throughout legal proceedings, including adoption cases is now a stated priority</p>	
20.	<p>The role of the Corporate Parenting Panel should be strengthened, with its annual report being presented to the Cabinet and then to the County council to ensure there is general recognition of its responsibilities for corporate parenting. This annual report should summarize the work of the Panel. It should also, where appropriate, make recommendations to Cabinet. Recommendations not agreed by Cabinet should be notified to the County Council.</p>	<p>April 2003</p>	<p>The membership of the Corporate Parenting panel has been increased and strengthened. The annual report of the Panel will be presented to Cabinet and then to the County Council to ensure general recognition of its responsibilities as a corporate parent.</p>	

No	Action to be taken	Target date	Progress	Comment by Corporate Parenting Panel
21.	The Corporate Parenting Panel should monitor the implementation of the recommendations of this Best Value Review.	6 monthly intervals from Jan 2003	Reports of progress in implementing the recommendations of the Best Value Review are presented to Corporate Parenting Panel prior to consideration at the Scrutiny Committee.	