

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN SCRUTINY SUB-PANEL

Venue: Town Hall,
Moorgate Street,
Rotherham. S60 2TH

Date: Wednesday, 23rd September 2009

Time: 2.00 p.m.

A G E N D A

1. To determine if the following matters are to be considered under the categories suggested, in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972.
2. To determine any item which the Chairman is of the opinion should be considered later in the agenda as a matter of urgency.
3. Apologies for Absence
4. Declarations of Interest
5. Minutes of the previous Meeting held on 8th July, 2009. (copy attached) (Pages 1 - 6)
6. Widening Access to Higher Education to Young People who have been in Local Authority Care. (briefing report attached) (Pages 7 - 14)
- for discussion.
7. 'Care Matters' - update. (report attached) (Pages 15 - 21)
Sue May/Simon Perry to report.
8. Rotherham Looked After Children Profile Report. (copy attached) (Pages 22 - 27)
Sue May to report.
9. Inspection of Fostering Services. (report attached) (Pages 28 - 31)
Simon Perry, Director of Targeted Services, to report.
10. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC
The following items are likely to be considered in the absence of the press and public as being exempt under those Paragraphs indicated below of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended March 2006):-
11. Issues emerging from Regulation 33 Reports Children's Homes. (report attached) (Pages 32 - 49)

Morri McDermott, Operations Manager – to report.
(Exempt under Paragraphs 2 and 3 - information likely to reveal identity of an individual/information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular individual (including the Council))

12. LAC Council. (report attached) (Pages 50 - 54)
Anne Marie Banks to report.
(Exempt under Paragraph 2 of the Act – information likely to reveal the identity of an individual)

**Date of Next Meeting:-
Wednesday, 2nd December 2009**

Membership:-

Chairman – Councillor G. A. Russell.
Councillors Austen, Barron, Burton, Dodson, Gosling, J. Hamilton, Jack, McNeely and P. A. Russell.
Together with Co-optees:- Mr. P. Owen, Mr. D. Trickett, Mrs. A. Lidster and Mrs. A. Wild

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN SCRUTINY SUB-PANEL
Wednesday, 8th July, 2009

Present:- Councillor G. A. Russell (in the Chair); Councillors Austen, Barron, Dodson, Gosling, J. Hamilton and McNeely; Mr. P. Owen (co-opted member).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Burton, Jack and P. A. Russell and from co-opted members Mrs. A. Lidster and Mr. D. Trickett.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 25TH MARCH, 2009

Agreed:- (1) That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Looked After Children Scrutiny Sub-Panel, held on 25th March, 2009, be approved as a correct record.

(2) That, with regard to Minute No. 23 (Progress against Fostering Inspection Action Plan (Ofsted Monitoring) – the Scrutiny Sub-Panel noted that the outcome of the Ofsted re-inspection during May, 2009 was that Rotherham's fostering services are now at a satisfactory standard overall (further details and the updated action plan would be reported to the next meeting of the Looked After Children Scrutiny Sub-Panel).

3. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN COUNCIL

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Looked After Children Support Team Manager outlining the duties placed upon local authorities within the Care Matters agenda to put into place new processes to hear the voice of the looked after child and to ensure that their needs are listened to and responded to. The report also detailed the progress made towards these requirements, in Rotherham.

The report stated that the Looked After Children Council has met with Elected Members on three occasions. The minutes of each meeting were appended to the report submitted. Their work has included:-

- work on the Borough Council and LAC Council's 'pledge' to Looked after Children;
- development of a magazine for Looked after Children; and
- work towards a full 'fun' day for a larger group of Looked After Children, which will enable wider consultation with young people.

Agreed:- That the report be received and the good progress of the Looked

After Children Council be noted.

4. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN SCRUTINY SUB-PANEL - DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2009/2010

Further to Minute No. 28 of the meeting of the Looked After Children Scrutiny Sub-Panel held on 25th March, 2009, consideration was given to a report submitted by the Senior Scrutiny Adviser concerning the Sub-Panel's terms of reference and suggesting an outline work programme for the 2009/10 Municipal Year that includes the key matters for scrutiny known to date and incorporating those areas identified by the Sub-Panel at previous meetings.

Agreed:- (1) That the report be received and its contents noted.

(2) That the 2009/2010 work programme of the Looked After Children Scrutiny Sub-Panel, as now submitted, be approved.

5. OFFENDING BY LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Operations Manager, Youth Offending Service, stating that reports about offending by looked after children were first requested in 2005 due to local and national concerns that 'Looked After' children and young people were at significantly greater risk of offending than the general population. There was a particular concern, which had been commented upon by local Magistrates, that those who were accommodated in the residential sector were most likely to become involved in the criminal justice system. Specifically the focus was on 'violent and disorder' offences within local authority children's homes. The data for the most recent year, 2008/09, was included in the report submitted.

The report described the more general picture of offending by young people who have been looked after for at least 12 months on 31st March 2009 and covered offences committed between 1st April 2008 and 31st March 2009. It is acknowledged that previous reports have covered other periods of the year, but there is nothing to suggest that this would have any significant impact on general trends or patterns. Reference was made to the age of criminal responsibility being 10 years, so the numbers of looked after children under consideration are those who have met the time factor of being looked after as above, and who are between 10 and 17 years of age.

The Sub-Panel discussed the joint working arrangements with Area Assemblies and with the Safer Neighbourhood Teams in respect of crime reduction generally.

Agreed:- (1) That the report be received and its contents noted.

(2) That the Looked After Children Scrutiny Sub-Panel supports the

actions, outlined in the report submitted, to reduce further offending by looked after children.

(3) That a progress report on offending by looked after children be reported to a future meeting of the Looked After Children Scrutiny Sub-Panel in twelve months' time.

6. OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PLACED ON CARE ORDERS WITH FAMILY MEMBERS OR AT HOME

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Service Manager, Operational Safeguarding Children Unit, stating that as at 31st March, 2009, there were 406 Looked After Children in the Rotherham Borough area. There are 33 children subject to Care Orders placed at home with their parents and subject to the necessary regulations. These 33 children and young people have access to the same support and resources as other Looked After Children who are in either foster care or residential care.

The report stated that the Performance Indicators relevant to Looked After Children are equally as applicable to those in placements, in foster care and residential care and in family placements.

The challenge for the Service is to support parents in maintaining school attendance, health assessments and diverting these young people away from anti-social behaviour and crime.

Placement agreements are developed where a looked after child returns home and parents are made aware of what is expected from them. It was noted that, on occasions, this objective is difficult to achieve.

The Scrutiny Sub-Panel debated the process leading to applications for the discharge of Care Orders and the importance of supporting Looked After Children towards independent living.

Agreed:- That the report be received and its contents noted.

7. FOSTERING FORTNIGHT / RECRUITMENT UPDATE (INCLUDING BME RECRUITMENT)

Further to Minute No. 24 of the meeting of the Looked After Children Scrutiny Sub-Panel held on 25th March, 2009, consideration was given to a report presented by the Looked After Children Service Manager concerning the fostering recruitment and retention plan which has been successful in increasing the numbers of prospective foster carers under assessment.

The report stated that the recruitment process has included fostering fortnight and specialist events such as meetings with representatives from the black and minority ethnic communities and attendance at Aiming

Higher consultation events.

Reference was made to the recruitment of foster carers by neighbouring local authorities and by the independent sector.

Agreed:- (1) That the report be received and its contents noted.

(2) That a progress report about the recruitment of foster carers be submitted to the next meeting of the Looked After Children Scrutiny Sub-Panel.

8. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN PROFILE

The Looked After Children Service Manager submitted a report providing the quarterly statistics and profile of the number of looked after children and young people in Rotherham. The report stated that, as at 31st May 2009, there were 409 looked after children, 29 of whom were supported by the children's disability team. This number was an increase from 353 children in June 2008, 387 in December 2008 and 391 in March, 2009.

Statistics were included in the report of the type of care received by looked after children and young people, their age range, type of care order and ethnic backgrounds.

Agreed:- That the report be received and its contents noted.

9. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN - PERCENTAGE OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN MISSING SCHOOL 2008/09

Further to Minute No. 26 of the meeting of the Looked After Children Scrutiny Sub-Panel held on 25th March, 2009, consideration was given to a report presented by Martin Smith, Manager of the Get Real Team, outlining the role of the Get Real Team in raising the attainment, achievement and aspirations of young people in care in Rotherham, mainly via short term intervention work, in addition to monitoring and supporting attendance at school across all key stages.

The report stated that by 22nd May, 2009, out of 212 young people of school age looked after by this Council, 13.25% have reached 25 days or more missing from school. (28 students in total) compared to 8.79% (19 students) reported to this Sub-Panel in March 2009. Details of the type of placement for these young people were also listed in the report.

Reference was made to the preparation of personal education plans for the looked after children and young people in Rotherham. The Sub-Panel noted that the role of Designated Teachers would have a statutory basis from September 2009 and would therefore have an effect upon looked after children in the future. Further reference was made to the training of school governors responsible for looked after children.

Agreed:- (1) That the report be received and its contents noted.

(2) That a further report be submitted to the next meeting of the Looked After Children Scrutiny Sub-Panel detailing the progress being made in raising the attainment, achievement and aspirations of young people in care in Rotherham, with particular reference to the training for school governors.

10. ISSUES EMERGING FROM REGULATION 33 REPORTS ON RESIDENTIAL HOMES

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Looked After Children Service Manager containing a summary of the main issues and events occurring in Children's Homes during the period March to June 2009. The report referred to the mainstream Children's Homes which are:

- Goodwin Crescent Children's Home at Swinton;
- St. Edmunds Avenue Children's Home at Thurcroft;
- Silverwood Children's Home, East Herringthorpe;
- Woodview Children's Home, Kimberworth Park.

The report provided information about the visits and reports made under Regulation 33 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2001. This regulation states that:-

"Where the registered provider is an individual, but is not in day to day charge of the children's home, he shall visit the home in accordance with this regulation". In Rotherham, the Manager of Operations, Looked After Children Resources performs this function.

Specific reference was made to the proposed improvements to the Children's Home at Goodwin Crescent, Swinton.

Agreed:- (1) That the report be received and its contents noted.

(2) That it be noted that the Manager of Operations, Looked After Children Resources shall continue to undertake the visits and reports in accordance with Regulation 33 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and submit reports to meetings of this Scrutiny Sub-Panel.

11. PERFORMANCE AGAINST KEY INDICATORS

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Performance Manager (Children and Young People's Services) outlining performance at the end of 2008/09 against targets for national indicators relating to services for Looked After Children.

Members noted that the format of the report had changed to provide more analysis and assessment of comparison and direction of travel, which will be valuable to managers, Directors and Elected Members under the Comprehensive Area Assessment regime.

Discussion took place on the range of the performance indicators, with Members noting the various areas of improvement and of under-performance and also the arrangements for performance clinics.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and its contents noted.

(2) That the Performance Report and accompanying Assessment (appendix A to the report submitted) be received and the performance relating to services for Looked After Children be noted.

(3) That the recommendations regarding performance clinics (as detailed within appendix A to the report submitted) be noted and arrangements be made for Members of the Looked After Children Scrutiny Sub-Panel to attend the performance clinics.

BRIEFING	
For:	Looked After Children Scrutiny Sub-Panel
Prepared by:	Martin Smith, Manager, Get Real Team,
Date:	23 September, 2009
ISSUE:	How can we encourage more children in state care to stay on at school or college after the official school-leaving age?

Background

Greater numbers of children living with their own families have aspirations of entering further or higher education. The Government has set out its ambition to increase participation in higher education towards 50 per cent for those aged 18 to 30 by 2010. Alongside this, the Government wants to widen participation so that more people from backgrounds that are currently under represented have the opportunity to participate in higher education. This includes young people in care. Young people who leave education at an early stage or do not have access to training or employment, are at higher risk of social exclusion. Education is the passport to the future for any child, but in particular Looked after Children

Numerous studies have shown that care leavers are far more likely, even compared with other disadvantaged young people, to be unemployed and/or homeless, to become teenage parents, have mental health problems, misuse alcohol or drugs and be drawn into the criminal justice system (Jackson, 2008).

The outcomes for Looked After Children and Young People are slowly improving but there is still an unacceptable gap between their outcomes and those of their peers. For example, Looked After Children and Young People are:

- 5 times less likely to achieve 5 good GCSEs,
- 9 times more likely to be excluded from school and
- 6 times less likely to enter higher education than their peers (Children and Young Persons Bill, 2008).

This responsibility for Local Authorities was set out in the Children Act, 1989.

The Government guidance for Councillors, "If This Were My Child", (2003) reiterated the leading role of Councillors in ensuring that their

Council acts as an effective corporate parent for all Looked After Children and Young People. It needs to actively support standards of care and seek high quality outcomes that every good parent would want for their child.

The Care Matters Agenda set out in the Green Paper and the subsequent White Paper, Time for Change (2007) outlines the support young people can expect when entering higher education.

This includes:

- applicants coming from care backgrounds can be identified and supported during the admission process and once they begin their studies.
- Introducing a national bursary, requiring local authorities to provide a minimum of £2,000 for all young people in care who go onto University.
- giving young people a choice of vacation accommodation while they are studying.

In addition, under section 20 of the Children and Young Persons Act, 2008, schools have a duty to appoint a Designated Teacher and Designated Governor to have responsibility to promote the educational achievement of looked after children who are registered pupils at the school. (The Designated teacher duty will become statutory from 1 September 2009).

Local Context

In Rotherham, The Get Real Team support the education of Looked After Children. The focus of the team is 3-16 years.

The aim of the Get Real Team is to

- reduce the educational attainment gap between Looked After Children and Young People and their peers.
- raise aspirations, reduce truancy and exclusions, supported by the use of Personal Education Plans.

The Get Real Team is providing training to support the introduction of designated teacher and governor provision.

Work undertaken at the moment by the Get Real Team:

- Three programmes run in partnership with Titans for years 6.9.10 to programme includes; raising self esteem, visit to RCAT, apprenticeship providers, Day visit to University, and visit to a bank.

- Two day visit Sheffield visiting both Universities with the opportunity to explore a traditional red brick University and a more modern university.
- Two day for carers to also explore Universities and finances.
- University befriended project. First year Social work Students supporting year 11 with GCSEs.
- Working with RCAT to support LAC draft agreement on course admission
- Year 9 aspirational interviews
- Links with Frank Buttle Trust (See attached paper)

Educational achievement has been linked to the expectation levels of key people around the learner (for example, foster carers). Higher expectations can lead to higher achievement.

All young people can achieve. The culture across the workforce providing services to Looked after Children, should support and listen to young people's aspirations. Workers will need to have the knowledge and understanding of further education and higher education and the routes to access.

This year GCSE results (out of a cohort 25)

- Number achieving 1 or more GCSE A-G (or equivalent)
Total 18 (72%) (2007/2008 26 Out of a cohort of 34 =76.5%)
- Number achieving 5 or more GCSE A-G (or equivalent)
Total 11 (45%) (2007/2008 17 out of 34 =50%)
- Number achieving 5 or more GCSE A-C (or equivalent)
Total 3 (12%) (2007/2008 3 out 34 = 9%)

In this years cohort five children attended special schools and were not able to access GCSE because of their learning needs.

(NB figure to be confirmed end September 2009)

Present number attending HE

Five young people currently undertaking Higher education courses.

- Media production
- Social Work
- Uniformed services
- Business and IT
- Business studies

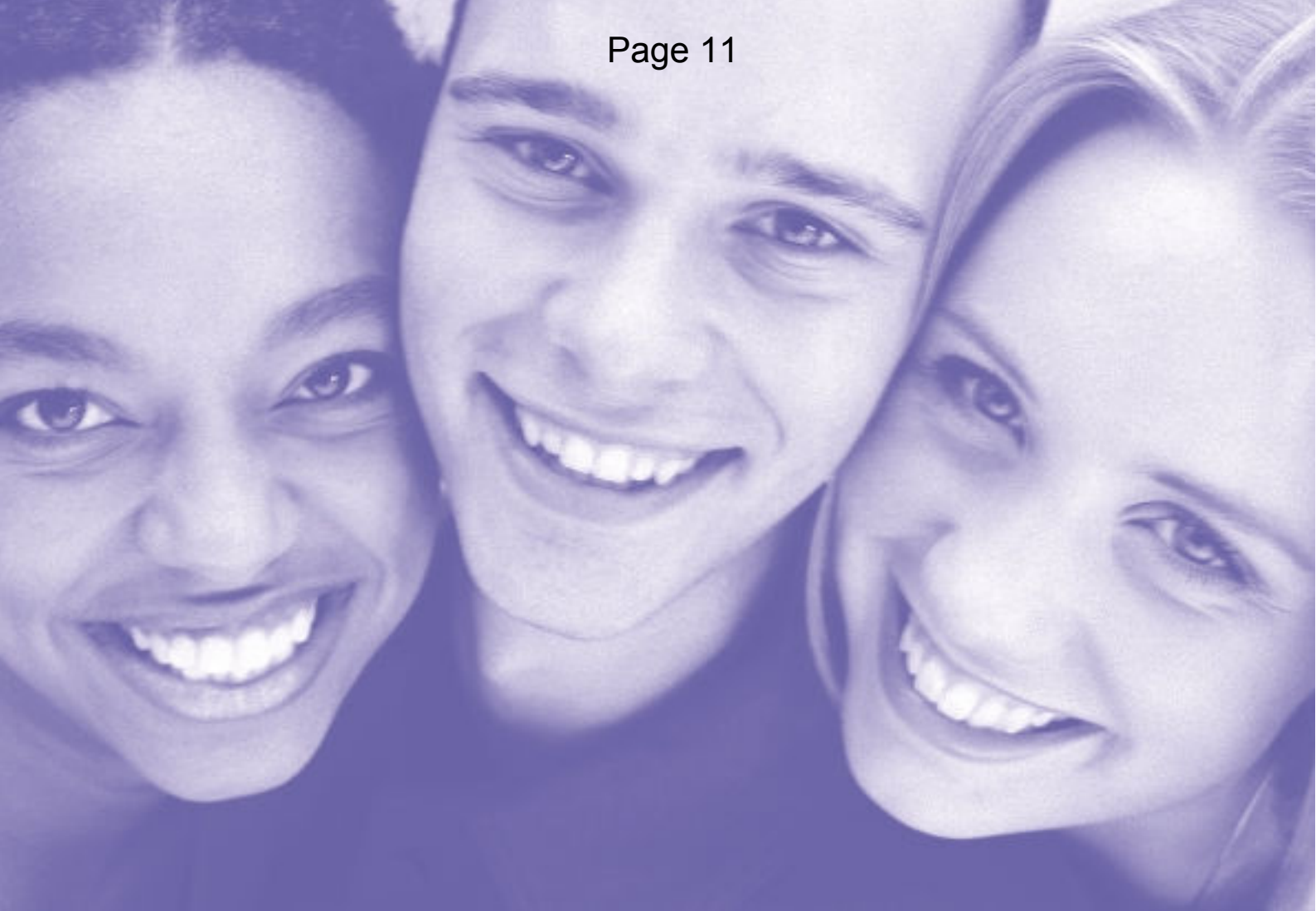
Six to start Higher Education this year

- Medicine

- Social work
- Music
- 2 x Nursing
- Business Studies

Areas for exploration:

- Accommodation outside term time.
- Financial support
- Whether University have bursaries on offer for LAC
- What access routes are available to enter higher education
- How we improve the expectations/understanding of carers
- Whether post-16 academic support can be improved
- Connexions support – what's in place?
- Monitoring post 16 achievements – how do we do this?
- What pastoral support is provided?



Going to university from care

Sonia Jackson, Sarah Ajayi and Margaret Quigley

Summary of findings and recommendations

INTRODUCTION

This is a summary of the final report of the *By Degrees* action research project, commissioned by the Frank Buttle Trust to explore the experiences of care leavers (about one in a hundred) who continue into higher education.

The principal aim of the project was to use this evidence to advise government, local authorities, universities and colleges in order to:

- increase the numbers of young people in care going to university
- enable them to make the most of their time there and to complete their courses successfully
- help local authorities to fulfil their obligations as corporate parents
- raise awareness among social workers, teachers, foster carers and residential workers.

Under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 (CLCA) local authorities have a statutory obligation to provide financial and personal support up to the age of 24 for young people formerly in care who are in full-time education. The Children Act 2004 for the first time lays a duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of children they look after.

We recruited three successive cohorts of 50 care leavers planning to continue into higher education. The first group was followed throughout their three-year degree courses, the second group for two years and the third group for their first year. Participants were interviewed on several occasions and also took part in a number of group events organised by the research team and the Frank Buttle Trust. The final research sample consisted of 129 young people, by far the largest number of students formerly in care that has ever been studied.

Postal surveys of local authorities and higher education institutions (HEIs) were carried out near the beginning and end of the project and 11 local authorities acted as a reference group with representatives interviewed annually.

THE PARTICIPANTS

Geographical distribution, gender, ethnicity, family background, reasons for coming into care, age of entry and educational qualifications were compared with the care population generally. The participants were mainly nominated by local authority lead officers for the education of looked-after children, or by after-care workers, but were all volunteers. They came from every part of England, with the highest proportion of nominations received from London boroughs.

Women outnumbered men in all cohorts, though less so among those coming from overseas. Just under half of the participants were white British, but minority ethnic groups were over-represented in the study sample by comparison with the total care population.

The family backgrounds of UK-born participants and reasons for coming into care were similar to those of other children in care. Sixty per cent of the research sample had suffered abuse or neglect before coming into care, almost exactly the same proportion as in the care population generally. Sixteen per cent of the participants were unaccompanied asylum-seekers. In the third cohort 40 per cent had been born overseas. Compared with UK participants they were rather more likely to have birth parents who were better educated and in higher-level occupations.

CARE AND EDUCATION BEFORE UNIVERSITY

A full care and educational history was obtained from every participant. Some were critical of aspects of their care experience, especially in residential units, but on balance coming into care was regarded as beneficial. The majority of participants had spent over five years in care and at least one placement had been helpful to their education. Young people who had been placed in a foster family with a strong commitment to supporting education considered this a key factor in their educational success. The quality of the final placement seemed to be more important than the overall number of placements, which ranged from two to 33. Nearly a third of foster carers had studied at degree level and 31 per cent of foster mothers worked in managerial, professional or related occupations. Foster placements had generally offered a much better educational environment than residential care.

Many young people had missed periods of school before coming into care and this caused problems later. However, once in care, the majority attended school regularly and did well. Their GCSE performance was close to the national average, although 40 per cent moved to further education colleges rather than continuing at school in Years 12 and 13. Seventy per cent in Cohorts 1 and 2 and 91 per cent in Cohort 3 obtained five or more A*-C passes at GCSE compared with 6 per cent of all looked after children at the time.

By Degrees participants were highly motivated to do well at school, which differentiated them from many other young people in care. A positive attitude to education might come from their birth family, their foster carer, friends and siblings, or the school itself. Many of the students described themselves as self-motivated and had shown extreme determination to overcome difficulties and achieve their objectives.

The main problems identified by participants at the point of application to university were lack of information and advice when choosing universities and courses; changes of placement during preparation for examinations; uncertainty about available financial support; and anxiety about accommodation during term time and vacations.

THE EXPERIENCE OF UNIVERSITY

Students who did not have supportive foster carers often felt very much alone during their early weeks. Some had difficulty processing the information provided and missed the chance to apply for grants for which they were eligible. Making friends at an early stage was extremely important and was easier for those with places in halls of residence. A number of students missed this opportunity due to delays in local authority decisions about funding. In their second and third years most participants moved into shared houses or flats.

Some students, especially in London, stayed in council houses or flats that they were allocated on leaving care. This severely restricted their choice of course and university. If their accommodation was distant from the institution where they were studying it was difficult for them to make friends and meant they did not have easy access to campus facilities such as computers and libraries. Council flats were of variable quality, sometimes very unsatisfactory, and there were failures of communication between Housing and Social Services Departments. Most participants became more skilled at budgeting during their second and third years but still suffered from a constant shortage of money. Their main source of debt was the student loan and

bank overdrafts; credit card debts were much rarer. Almost all took out the maximum student loan every year and after three years their average level of debt was £11,235, compared with the national average of £9,210. They were usually obliged to take jobs in supermarkets or bars throughout every vacation, including the summer, and few could afford holidays.

Students who did not receive enough financial support from their local authority often took on too much paid work and this conflicted with academic demands and might result in failure to submit assignments or inadequate preparation for examinations. Lack of money also limited their social activities and prevented them from engaging fully in university life.

However the majority of participants, looking back over their university experience, said that they had thoroughly enjoyed it and learnt a great deal. They felt it had given them an opportunity to mature and acquire social and life skills gradually instead of being precipitated into adult life like most care leavers. They were vividly aware of the advantages that their education had brought them compared with other young people in care.

STAYING THE COURSE

A few potential students never got started because they did not achieve the required exam grades and no one was available to advise them of the many options still open to them. The drop-out rate for *By Degrees* participants (10 per cent) was lower than the national average of 14 per cent and applied almost entirely to the first cohort.

The main sources of stress were shortage of money, fear of debt, psychological problems arising from care and pre-care experiences, academic difficulties, relationship problems, upsets in birth or foster family, isolation and lack of emotional support. Students were most in danger of dropping out when three or more of these factors coincided. Difficulties in contacting social services caused extreme frustration. Participants with problems did not get appropriate help from Student Support Services in their institution and many had no contact with personal tutors.

The majority showed themselves to be very resilient and persisted with their studies regardless of poverty, ill health and family problems. Fewer participants in Cohorts 2 and 3 left prematurely, possibly reflecting better support from local authorities following implementation of the CLCA.

COMING FROM OVERSEAS

Young people born in countries outside the UK made up an increasing proportion of the research sample, amounting to 41 per cent in the third cohort. Sixteen per cent were unaccompanied asylum-seekers compared with only 5 per cent in the care population. Some young people travelled with paid agents who quickly deserted them, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation.

Participants from overseas usually had clear educational goals and were highly motivated to aim for university. Most reported that their parents had impressed on them the overriding importance of educational success for their future life chances. Despite having suffered extreme trauma and adversity none dropped out, except one in his second year of university who was refused permission to stay. They tended to be more focused on their studies and in many cases worked much harder than UK-born students with a care background, putting in on average twice as many hours of private study. Seventy-two per cent of asylum-seeking students were awaiting status decisions, feared repatriation and often lacked support from their local authorities.

THE LOCAL AUTHORITY AS CORPORATE PARENT

An important aim of the project was to assess how far the CLCA had improved the level of support offered by local authorities to

care leavers going to university. Comparison of responses from the two surveys carried out three years apart, together with the longitudinal study of 12 local authorities, showed that progress had been made at the policy level but that there were still wide variations in practice between different authorities.

More local authorities now have established procedures and written protocols that can be accessed by young people in care. We found that they are more willing than in 2001 to provide educational equipment, especially computers, and the proportion extending foster placements or converting them to supported lodgings has gone up. This improvement is reflected in the much lower drop-out rate for Cohorts 2 and 3.

On the negative side, only a minority of local authorities offered continuing personal support from a named person or Personal Adviser into the second and third years. In most cases the level of financial support provided fell well short of the benchmark figures used by the Frank Buttle Trust in assessing grant eligibility (see Appendix 5 in the full report).

WIDENING PARTICIPATION

Despite the finding that participants were attending 68 universities and colleges, including all the most prestigious ones, there is still a view among university administrators and admissions tutors that young people in care are not capable of reaching a sufficient standard to benefit from higher education.

Judging from our second survey, Government initiatives such as Aimhigher, designed to increase the numbers of disadvantaged young people going to university, do not appear to have raised awareness of the needs of care leavers to any appreciable extent. Most higher education institutions now have officers in post with a widening participation remit. However, very few of those who responded to our surveys had any provision in place for applicants or students with a care background and there seemed to have been little change over three years. Various kinds of outreach programmes had developed between the first and second *By Degrees* surveys, but only one university is known to have a comprehensive policy relating to care leavers. Ninety-five per cent do not offer any special pastoral support to students known to have been in care.

Seventy-seven per cent of the research participants, with some reservations, said they would have been willing to tick a box on the UCAS (universities entrance) form if one had been available.

CONCLUSIONS

The *By Degrees* research has provided important new information on a group of young people never previously studied. The findings have implications not only for the small number who at present go on to higher education but for the education and well-being of all children in care. It provides clear evidence that their ability and potential are being systematically underestimated and that they are deprived of most educational opportunities open to children growing up in their own families.

The research participants felt that they had obtained many benefits from their involvement in the project and were very appreciative of way the study had been conducted by the research team. They were keen that the information and experiences that they had shared with the researchers should be used to encourage more young people in care to aim for university. They thought the Government should insist on full implementation of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 so that all young people who had been in care, wherever they come from, would receive adequate support from their local authority. The 43 recommendations in the full report are informed by the views expressed by all the young people who took part in the project.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Guidance to the CLCA should make it clear that financial support for higher education students from local authorities should not be provided at a minimum level but be flexible and adapted to individual needs.
2. The Government should consider ring-fencing funds so that support for care leavers in higher education does not have to compete with ordinary placement costs for under-18s.
3. Schools should be aware of the educational and support needs of children in care but also of the danger of under-estimating their ability and potential.
4. Secondary schools should be carefully chosen to give children in care the best chance of achieving high academic standards.
5. Schools should recruit university students or graduates to act as mentors to disadvantaged pupils, and particularly those in care.
6. University (UCAS) and college application forms should include an optional tick-box to indicate that an applicant has been in local authority care.
7. Foster carers should be trained and funded to value and promote educational achievement and to provide accommodation and support for young people during the examination years.
8. Young people should have the option of remaining in their foster homes (or returning to them during vacations) throughout their higher education courses.
9. Local authorities should make greater use of boarding schools, combined with weekend and holiday foster placements, especially for academically able young people.
10. All residential units should provide excellent conditions for study, a regular quiet period for homework and access to personal computers throughout the day and evening. There should be specialist units for later entrants to care preparing for examinations.
11. Children's homes should have a visiting education adviser and arrangements for outside help with homework.
12. Prospective students should be given a written contract specifying the financial and other support to be provided by their local authority, based on discussion of their individual needs and circumstances.
13. Students should be advised and funded to live in university accommodation for the first year.
14. Every student should have a named Personal Advisor for the full duration of his or her course.
15. All higher education institutions should have a comprehensive policy for recruitment, retention and support of students from a care background.
16. More HEIs should develop compact arrangements with local authorities to increase participation of care leavers, who should be specifically invited to open days and summer schools.
17. All institutions should have a named liaison person who can be contacted by leaving care teams and Personal Advisors.
18. Student Welfare/Support Services should contact new students known to have been in care and be proactive in offering any necessary help with financial, study or personal problems. They should be alerted to danger signals such as falling behind with assignments.
19. Admissions tutors and widening participation officers should be better informed about the care system and understand that examination grades may reflect difficulties overcome rather than the applicant's level of ability.
20. The Government should fund local authorities to support the education of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. Local authorities should provide skilled support and advice on status problems and ensure high quality legal representation in case of need.

Going to University from Care

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1.	Meeting:	Looked After Children Scrutiny Sub-Panel
2.	Date:	Wednesday, 23rd September 2009
3.	Title:	Care Matters
4.	Directorate:	Children and Young People's Services

5. Summary

A briefing on the Care Matters agenda was presented to Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's services in June 2008 and subsequent reports to Cabinet Member and the Children's Board have provided updates on developments within the DCSF agenda, the results of an initial gap analysis of Rotherham provision in respect of the Care Matters agenda and progress made to improve provision for our children.

The Care Matters agenda contains a range of required actions for Local Authorities together with timescales for implementation.

This report provides a progress report following the full review of the Care Matters agenda and gap analysis of service provision within Rotherham. This agenda has implications for Directorates across Children's and Young People's Services. On the whole service provision is good and many aspects of the proposed legislation are incorporated within existing practice. Where gaps have been identified, action plans have been developed to ensure compliance.

6. Recommendations

- **That the contents of the report are noted and the proposals contained within this report are endorsed.**

7. Proposals and Details

Background

Care Matters: Time for Change (Department for Education and Skills) aims to improve the lives and life chances of Looked after Children. The executive summary states "Despite high ambitions and a shared commitment for change, outcomes for children and young people in care have not sufficiently improved.... Tackling this requires urgent, sustained action across central and local government".

In April 2008 the DCSF published an implementation log and timetable to assist Local Authorities to plan effectively for change.

The Children and Young People's Act received Royal assent in 2008 and provided a legal framework for some aspects of the agenda.

Rotherham M.B.C. Actions

The action log was used as a basis for a full scale review of service provision and gap analysis against the government agenda. This has involved input from across all directorates within Children and Young People's services, much of the planning concerns detailed aspects of service provision and work will continue on ensuring that all aspects of the agenda are responded to. A brief summary of key aspects of the changed agenda and our response to date follows:

Corporate Parenting – Getting it right.

- **All Councils must have a Looked after Children's Council whose members work with elected members and directors to develop service provision.** The Rotherham Looked after Children's Council had its first meeting with elected members and directors on Friday 31st October 2008 and continues to meet regularly with Directors and Elected Members. They have produced a magazine, given to all Looked after Children in Rotherham over the age of 10 and are planning a full day activity and consultation event to ensure all looked after children have the opportunity to have their voice heard.
- **An integrated OFSTED inspection of Looked after Children's services is to be developed.** This has now been developed and has clear links to inspections of Safeguarding services. A recent fostering inspection gave an outcome of Satisfactory with four of the 6 dimensions inspected rated as good. An action plan is in place to address areas identified within the report

Family and Parenting Support

- **Each Local Authority must provide intensive support for families where care is not the right option, including good quality assessment of need, support to enable families to be reunited and clear child in need plans for all children returned home.** This is a clear priority within the integrated services agenda and the forthcoming realignment of Directorate responsibilities will ensure an enhanced focus on early intervention for children in need as well as focussed support for Looked after Children.

- **Friends and Family Carers should be encouraged and well supported, including support for relatives to apply for Residence order and Special Guardianship orders.** Assessments of Friends and Family carers are now undertaken by the fostering team in conjunction with the child's social worker, this has improved timescales for assessment. A review of support to Friends and Family carers has improved service provision and a principle practitioner within the Fostering Supervising Social worker team will take lead responsibility for further improvements. Friends and Family carers are also supported to apply for other orders and means tested allowances or in certain circumstances, non means tested allowances are available. We aim to further improve practice in this area and support more friends and family carers to apply for Residence and Special Guardianship orders. A clear policy and practice guidance on Special Guardianship is in development and will be sent to all social workers in September to ensure improved focus on non care means of securing a child's future.
- **Short Breaks for Families with disabled children are to be promoted (linked to the Disability Matters agenda).** We have an existing and well used short breaks service which has the capacity for expansion, funding from within the Aiming High for Disabled Children agenda has been allocated to employ a full time Fostering Recruitment and Assessment worker and to provide financial support for an additional 30 placements over 2 years. Service development is on target to deliver these placements.

Care Placements – A better experience for everyone

- **The Government will place a new statutory duty on Local Authorities to provide sufficient good quality placements within the local area. Placements of children outside the area should not be made except where this is clearly in the best interests of the child. Regional commissioning pilots and guidance on managing the markets will be given.** An increased number of children are in agency placements; however, the majority are within the region. In response to this agenda, a regional commissioning pilot is in development and the commissioning team in Rotherham have developed a commissioning strategy which ensures value for money. A fostering services strategy to recruit and assess more foster carers within Rotherham has commenced to good effect.
- **CWDC guidance for both the Fostering and residential services has been issued and further guidance will soon be available, including National Occupational Standards.** A new post of Training coordinator, within the fostering team has been established, through virement of the workforce, to assist the team to develop a coordinated training strategy to meet the emerging requirements. A part time social work qualified post to lead on requirements within CWDC has also been established as a specialism within the team in order to provide structured support for foster carers and colleagues within the team. Many foster carers have found CWDC training a positive experience which has enabled them to reflect on learning and evidence good practice, some have experienced greater challenge and even with intensive support a small number may chose to leave fostering as a result of the greater pressure.

- **A new Independent Review Mechanism will be established to allow appeal for prospective Foster Carers who have not been approved by the recruiting organisation.** This has been ratified by the 2008 Act. BAAF (British association for Adoption and Fostering) will provide this service for a flat fee should it be necessary.

Delivering a first class education

- **A range of measures are contained within the Act to improve the quality of education and support to Looked after children, including an early years PEP, monitoring of exclusions and absences and improvements in Home-school agreements.** Monitoring is undertaken thoroughly and reported regularly to members. An Early Years PEP has been developed and will be used from September; a designated Early Years worker within the Get Real team will drive this agenda. Training is given to Foster Carers on partnership working with schools.
- **Roles and responsibilities within the education services will be made explicit including the requirement to have a designated teacher for Looked after Children, a designated school governor and a virtual head responsible for all Looked after Children.** The Get Real team has moved into the School Effectiveness Service in order to ensure ease of compliance with this aspect of the agenda. All schools have a designated teacher and governor and training is provided by the Get Real team.
- **A personal Education allowance of up to £500 must be made available to all LAC who are at risk of failing in their education.** This has been implemented in Rotherham. All PEP's now contain an application section. The scheme is closely monitored by the Get Real team and monies used creatively to enhance the education opportunities for all LAC

Promoting Health and Well-being

- **“Promoting the Health of Looked after Children” was re-issued in 2008 and placed on a statutory footing.** We have followed this guidance in developing our LAC Health provision however a full review against these requirements using the ‘healthy care audit tool’ is currently being undertaken by a task and finish group with senior management representation from both the council and PCT.
- **The mental health needs of all LAC must be addressed. Use of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) has been made compulsory for all LAC.** We have commenced using the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire. We use this to direct resources and monitor progress. The mental health support needs of LAC are high and with current resources the team will struggle to meet need. Capacity building is being undertaken through training of staff and carers in attachment work and therapeutic techniques. Over 80% of Foster carers have undertaken training with the looked after and adopted children's support team (LAAC) Team.

Transition to Adulthood

- **Young people should be allowed to remain in Foster care over the age of 18 if they so wish.** Currently legislation determines that foster carers cannot receive boarding out allowances for young people over the age of 18 and the government proposes to amend the legislation. In Rotherham, foster carers may convert to supported lodgings providers in order to receive ongoing funding.
- **Young people should also not move into unregulated placements (eg. Independent tenancies) without a clear assessment and plan.** Pathway plans do inform placement move in Rotherham. The leaving care team is adopting the new DCSF Pathway plan model to further improve assessment and contingency planning.
- **All care leavers in Further and Higher education up to the age of 25 should have financial provision made and appropriate support.** This is an area where practice in Rotherham has been good and provision in Rotherham meets the requirements of the 2008 Act
- **Foster carers should be provided with the right tools to assist young people to prepare for independence training.** Action for children will provide training on independence skills for Foster Carers and this will be written into the new training plan.
- **Each child, Looked after for more than a year will have £100 per year in care invested in a Child Trust fund.** We have a system in place for administering this.

The Role of the Practitioner

- **Pilot projects operating “Social Work Practices”, (specialist social workers for Looked after Children), are in operation to test the risks and benefits of the model.** This model runs counter to the Rotherham model of integrated service delivery from within the locality. We will review practice when the results of the model are known and further guidance issued.
- **A named IRO must meet with the child individually and ascertain their views about their care.** This is current practice within Rotherham, and the IRO system has been further developed through viring of staff into a dedicated team of IRO's and placement of the team within the Operational Safeguarding children service.
- **All children who do not have regular contact with their family should be encouraged to have an independent visitor.** The existing independent visitor scheme has been placed within the safeguarding children service and will be expended in order to ensure we have the capacity to meet need. As it is a requirement of the Act to ensure all children who do not have an independent person visiting them are supported by an independent visitor the scheme will require further funding to meet need.

8. Finance

Government grant funding has been allocated to implement the Care Matters agenda, over a three year period, the funds are as follows

2008/9 182,221
2009/10 248,993
2010/11 286,603

Current expenditure on Out of Authority Foster placements is high and this funding may be utilised to offset some placement costs.

Expectations of local provision of high quality fostering and residential placements will have ongoing financial implications, especially given the clear Ofsted judgement in respect of overcrowding within Rotherham Foster Placements given in 2008. Utilisation of some of this funding to develop service provision will be necessary to ensure a lessening reliance on Out of Authority placements.

The Care Matters Agenda indicates that the grant funding should be primarily used to ensure good quality placements for all within the local area and some provision has been made to fund ongoing quality media campaigns and to provide a focus on the recruitment, selection and Training of Foster Carers.

We await the outcome of the pilots in respect of young people remaining in Foster Care over the age of 18; however as we currently support conversion to supported lodgings, the full financial implications of this will be tempered.

Development of the Health provision to meet all requirements within “promoting the Health of Looked after Children” may have financial implications. A joint agency overview of service provision is currently underway and a briefing paper will be prepared on completion.

There is a high expectation of excellence in service provision across the board and it is likely that the prioritisation agenda will be informed by the Ofsted inspection regime.

The LAC Cabinet has commenced working with Service Directors and Elected Members to develop service provision and the group have made some low cost suggestions to improve their support and that of Foster Carers and these are also under consideration.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The new integrated inspections of Looked after Children’s services and National Occupational standards for Foster Carers and Residential staff will require close scrutiny as these will set the benchmark for judgements on our service provision.

Some funding is available from the Government to implement this agenda, however, early indications are that this will not be sufficient.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

There are performance implications for all Looked after Children's indicators. Performance is monitored closely and this agenda supports our existing improvement strategies.

11. References

This report has been written with reference to

Care Matters: Time for Change
Care Matters, Implementation Plan and Action Log
Aiming High for Disabled Children
Ofsted Report , Rotherham Fostering Services
Rotherham M.B.C. Response to Care Matters and Gap analysis
Children and Young People's Act 2008

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ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1. Meeting: Looked After Children's Scrutiny Panel
2. Date 23rd September 09
3. Title: Rotherham Looked After Children Report
4. Programme Area: Children and Young Peoples

The Quarterly Report for Looked After Children's Scrutiny Panel, Profile of Numbers of Children, Looked After.

There are currently 400 Looked after Children, 28 of whom are open to the children's disability team. This is an increase from 353 in June 08 391 in March 09 but a decrease from 409 in June 09.

Care Type

07/09/2009

LAC as at 400

**Total
Children**

	0 - 5	06 - 10	11 - 15	16 +	Sum:
Foster Care Inside Rotherham	58	42	49	25	174
Foster Care Outside Rotherham	37	24	30	4	95
Placed with Parents	9	7	13	9	38
Placed for adoption	25	5	2		32
Residential inside Rotherham			11	6	17
Residential outside Rotherham		1	7	2	10
Secure Unit outside Rotherham			1	1	2
Other Placement			1	1	2
Independent Living				13	13
Not Recorded	3		8	6	17
Sum:	132	79	122	67	400

Age By Care Type

	0 - 5	06 - 10	11 - 15	16 +	Sum:
C1 - Interim care order	51	20	9		80
C2 - Full care order	14	33	79	45	171
D1 - Freed for adopt. (freeing order granted)		6	5		11
E1 - Placement Order Granted	61	12	3		76
J1 - In LA on remand/committed for trial / sentence			3		3
V2 - Single Period of Accommodated under section 20	6	8	23	22	59
Sum:	132	79	122	67	400

31/05/2009

LAC as at 409

Total Children

	0 - 5	06 - 10	11 - 15	16 +	Sum:
Foster Care Inside Rotherham	73	49	50	26	198
Foster Care Outside Rotherham	38	19	32	5	94
Placed with Parents	9	5	12	9	35
Placed for adoption	19	2	4		25
Residential inside Rotherham			8	11	19
Residential outside Rotherham			8	2	10
Secure Unit outside Rotherham			3	2	5
Other Residential	1				1
Other Placement				1	1
Independent Living				11	11
Not Recorded	1		4	5	10
Sum:	141	75	121	72	409

Care Order

	0 - 5	06 - 10	11 - 15	16 +	Sum:
C1 - Interim care order	58	18	8		84
C2 - Full care order	15	34	78	47	174
D1 - Freed for adopt. (freeing order granted)		6	6	1	13
E1 - Placement Order Granted	57	12	3		72
J1 - In LA on remand/committed for trial / sentence			4	1	5
V2 - Single Period of Accommodated under section 20	11	5	23	23	62
Sum:	141	75	122	72	410

Type of Care

Type of Care	Sum	Percentage
Foster Care Inside Rotherham	174.00	43.50 %
Foster Care Outside Rotherham	95.00	23.75 %
Placed with Parents	38.00	9.50 %
Placed for adoption	32.00	8.00 %
Residential inside Rotherham	17.00	4.25 %
Residential outside Rotherham	10.00	2.50 %
Secure Unit outside Rotherham	2.00	0.50 %
Other Placement	2.00	0.50 %
Independent Living	13.00	3.25 %
Not Recorded	17.00	4.25 %
Sum:	400.00	
Percent:		100.00 %

Ethnicity

**LAC as at
Total Children 400**

	White - British	White - Irish	White - Other	Asian - Other	Asian - Pakistani	Black - African	Other - Any	Dual Heritage - White And Black Caribbean	Dual Heritage - White And Asian	Dual Heritage - Other	Dual Heritage - White And Black African	Gypsy/Roma	Sum:
Foster Care Inside Rotherham	158	1	2	1		4	3		3	2			174
Foster Care Outside Rotherham	80				3		6	2	2		1	1	95
Placed with Parents	33		1				1		2	1			38
Placed for adoption	30		1				1						32
Residential inside Rotherham	17												17
Residential outside Rotherham	10												10
Secure Unit outside Rotherham	2												2
Other Placement	2												2
Independent Living	6			6			1						13
Not Recorded	15		1				1						17
Sum:	353	1	5	7	3	4	13	2	7	3	1	1	400

	White - British	White - Irish	White - Other	Asian - Other	Asian - Pakistani	Black - African	Other - Any	Dual Heritage - White And Black Caribbean	Dual Heritage - White And Asian	Dual Heritage - Other	Dual Heritage - White And Black African	Gypsy/Roma	Sum:
C1 - Interim care order	66				3	2	7		1	1			80
C2 - Full care order	161	1	1			2	2	2	1	1			171
D1 - Freed for adopt. (freeing order granted)	11												11
E1 - Placement Order Granted	65		4				2		5				76
J1 - In LA on remand/committed for trial / sentence	3												3
V2 - Single Period of Accommodated under section 20	47			7			2			1	1	1	59
Sum:	353	1	5	7	3	4	13	2	7	3	1	1	400

LAC by Type of Accommodation

LAS Type Of Accomodation	Sum
A3 - Placed for Adoption With Consent (current Foster Carer)	3.00
A4 - Placed for Adoption With Consent (not current Foster Carer)	4.00
A6 - Placed for Adoption With Placement Order (not current Foster Carer)	25.00
F1 - Foster Placement in LA - Relative / Friend	25.00
F2 - Placement in LA - Foster Carer by LA	137.00
F3 - Placement in LA - Foster Carer Agency	12.00
F4 - Foster Placement outside LA - Relative / Friend	2.00
F5 - Placement outside LA - Foster Carer by LA	13.00
F6 - Placement outside LA - Foster Carer Agency	80.00
H2 - Secure Unit outside LA boundary	2.00
H3 - Children`s Homes located inside LA boundary	17.00
H4 - Children`s Homes located outside LA boundary	10.00
H5 - Resid. Accom. not subject to Children's Homes Regulations..	4.00
M3 - Whereabouts unknown	1.00
Not Recorded	2.00
P1 - Placed with parents or other with Parental Resp.	38.00
P2 - Independent living (flat/lodgings/friends/B&B)	13.00
Q1 - Foster Placement with Relative or Friend	1.00
R1 - Residential Care Home	4.00
S1 - All Residential Schools, except where Dual-Registered as a School and Childrens Home	4.00
T1 - Temporary Periods in Hospital	1.00
Z1 - Other Placement	2.00
Sum:	400.00

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ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS
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1.	Meeting:	LAC Scrutiny Meeting
2.	Date:	23rd September 2009
3.	Title:	Inspection of Fostering Services
4.	Directorate:	Children and Young People's Services

5. Summary

Rotherham's Fostering Services were inspected during the week commencing 22nd June 2009. This report summarises the findings of the inspection, lays out the actions required to improve provision and the recommendations made to improve provision, and considers the resource implications.

The inspection recorded an overall outcome of Satisfactory, with 'good' scores across four areas. The inspectors commented positively on the progress made over the last year, especially in reducing the number of placements requiring an exemption to acceptable numbers and in the development of a robust risk assessment procedure.

There are a number of actions required by the service and an action plan is in place to address these.

6. Recommendations

- **That the contents of the report are noted**
- **That the Action Plan is noted and supported**

7. Proposals and Details

The Ofsted inspection of fostering services is an annual event and tests the Local Authority against the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and Fostering National Minimum Standards. Ofsted's judgements about the quality of our provision is published on the internet and should be made available to children and young people and relevant stakeholders. The Inspection in 2008 resulted in a judgement of 'inadequate' and highlighted practice that caused very serious concern to Ofsted. An action plan to ensure improvement and progress, and to monitor a number of 'statutory requirements and recommendations within the 2008 Inspection Report, has been in place and regularly monitored by the LAC Service Manager and Director of targeted Services and overseen by Cabinet Member, Chief Officers and the Safeguarding Board.

The Fostering Inspection looks at the five ECM outcome areas and the organisation and management of the service. An additional area has been introduced to review the service in relation to Equality and Diversity. Each area is rated by one of four judgements:

- Outstanding - provision of exceptional high quality.
- Good - provision is strong.
- Satisfactory - provision is sound.
- Inadequate - provision is not good enough.

Based on these an overall quality rating is given, although it should be noted that the 'safe' outcome is given primacy and the overall rating cannot be higher than that of 'safe'.

Rotherham's results from the 2009 Inspection are:-

Helping children to be healthy	Satisfactory
Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe	Satisfactory
Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do	Good
Helping children make a positive contribution	Good
Achieving economic well-being	Good
Equality and Diversity	Good
Organisation	Satisfactory
Overall rating	Satisfactory

The Inspection Report acknowledges the progress that has been made in Rotherham in the past year, confirmed and exemplified in verbal feedback between the Inspectors and Directors. There is still a way to go and areas that require further attention, but the direction of travel for fostering services is positive. The Ofsted inspectors gave a clear message that they had recorded a judgement of satisfactory as they felt that Directors and Members had shown commitment to real and sustained change. They were also clear that they would seek to reassure themselves that this change had been sustained

and, for example that the numbers of children within individual placements had not risen again.

The Report also includes:-

Statutory requirements to improve

- 1. Ensure that placements made under Regulation 38 meet the Regulation and that all placements are reviewed at panel within 6 weeks.** An action plan was already in place to address these issues, including the creation of a new post of Friends and Family (Reg 38) Fostering Social Worker. The inspectors expressed satisfaction with the action plan. Work is underway to address this issue and progress is closely monitored.

- 2. Ensure that the service is managed with sufficient care, competence and skill to ensure that the monitoring systems in place are effective.** Monitoring systems were seen by the inspectors to have improved and evidenced through file audit though further improvements were seen to be necessary to ensure robust scrutiny of all aspects of the service. A schedule of performance management through supervision and increased file audits has been implemented. ADM authorisation is now required for any placement made 'out of category' (eg. of a child within a differing age band to approval status)

- 3. Ensure that panel minutes provide an accurate record of the discussion and decisions made.** The pool of available minute takers has been enhanced and additional training sought. The LAC Service Manager will commence as Panel Advisor in September 2009 and will undertake robust scrutiny of panel minutes.

8. Finance

The number of Rotherham Looked after Children has increased considerably over the last year, from 337 in December 07 and 353 in June 08 to a current figure of 416. The imperative to reduce numbers in placement and to place increasing numbers of children has led to a large increase in the numbers of children placed in Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). There are currently 116 children placed in such placements.

The placement budget for IFA placements is insufficient to meet the current demand.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

A successful recruitment campaign has resulted in an increase in the numbers of foster carers approved by panel and the quality of care provided by these carers is perceived to be good. National Guidance on placements with new carers does though impact on the number of placements available (panel will only in exceptional circumstances approve for more than one placement with a new carer). Additionally, an aging population of existing

carers (a national phenomenon) and a number of resignations due to the increased pressures of fostering, impacts negatively on total overall figures. Therefore, despite an unprecedented recruitment campaign and confidence in meeting a target of 30 new foster carer recruits in 09/10, this will not translate into the equivalent increase to overall number of foster carers.

The number of Looked After Children appears to be levelling out at between 400 and 420. A new focus on Early Intervention and on securing alternative placement routes (for example Residence orders or Special Guardianship Orders) will bring down the numbers of children looked after, although it is likely to be one to two years before an appreciable effect is seen.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

Performance within the Fostering Ofsted inspection is now closely linked to performance in Safeguarding inspections and the CAA. There will be a further inspection of Fostering Services in 12 months though the Service is prepared for an unannounced inspection of Safeguarding services at any point.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

This report has been prepared with reference to the Ofsted inspection report received in August 2009 and verbal feedback given by the inspectors.

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