



Kirklees
METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

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Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel

Report on

EDUCATION OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

November 2002

Kirklees Metropolitan Council

The Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel – Education of Looked After Children was established by the Scrutiny Committee in March 2002 following a referral by Councillor Bates, the then Chair of Social Affairs and Health Scrutiny Panel.

Terms of Reference

1. To establish by reference to statistical information and other evidence, how effectively the Council is educating its looked after children, examining particularly:
 - relative attainment rates (if possible on a “value added” basis)
 - relative absence & exclusion rates
 - continuity in schools attended
2. To investigate the effectiveness of joint working between Social Services and Education and the key issues facing the services in the Education of Looked After Children, including any links with the Special Education Needs process.
3. To discuss this matter with Looked After Children at school and those who have left school.
4. To make recommendations as appropriate with respect to improvements in service provision: and more effective exercise by all Elected Members of their educational responsibilities as corporate parents.

Membership of the Panel

The Panel members were Councillors Molly Walton (Chair), Margaret Fearnley and Sheila Hey.

Officer support was provided by Julie McDowell of the Decision Support Unit.

The Work of the Panel

The Panel met on 11 June and 11 July 02 to plan the review and to consider statistical information.

The Panel met with young people who are or who have recently been in the care of the Authority on 18 July 02 and 26 September 02 to discuss their experiences and ideas for making improvements. One young person undertook a survey and put forward ideas.

The Panel met jointly with Officers from Social Services and Education Services on 6 September 02 and separately on 15 October 02.

The Panel considered Best Practice in other authorities on 20 September 02 and met with carers on 15 October 02.

The Panel determined conclusions and recommendations on 18 October 02

Acknowledgements

The Panel is grateful to the following witnesses who gave evidence:

Phil Tomlinson – General Manager (Children's & Families Services)
Sue Grigg – Pathway Team Planning Manager (Children & Families Service)
Jo Brook – Co-ordinator (Education of Looked After Children Support Team)
Joe Wilson – Education Social Work Service Manager
Harry Shiels – Teacher (Education of Looked After Children Support Team)
Jeanne Johnson – Foster Carer
Vic Szczesnowicz – Residential Manager (Woodlands)
Val Wilkinson – Residential Social Worker (Market Street)

Members would particularly like to thank all the young people who openly and frankly discussed their experiences. The Panel is grateful to Caroline Free and Sarah Tomlinson of the Authority's Children's Rights Service for facilitating these sessions.

The Panel gives special thanks to the young person who undertook a survey of young people in residential homes and who put forward practical ideas for improvements.

Thanks also goes to Julie Walker of the Young Peoples' Service who advised the Panel on how it should consult with young people.

Documentation

Statistics on the educational performance of looked after children in Kirklees as at 30 September 01 and September 02.

Government Guidance on the Education of Young People in Public Care (LAC 2000/13)

Kirklees Guidelines on the Education of Looked After Children & Young People (September 1998)

Information from Stockport BC, Nottinghamshire CC, Buckinghamshire CC, Step up 2000 in Derbyshire.

Context of the work

Kirklees Council has corporate parenting responsibilities for children in its care. Government Guidance on the Education of Young People in Public Care defines this as the collective responsibility of local authorities to achieve good parenting. A corporate parent is expected to do at least what a good parent would do. It is the duty of the whole authority to safeguard and promote the welfare of these children. This includes Councillors, schools, and Local Education Authorities as well as Social Services.

The responsibility of the corporate parent continues at least until the age of 21 years and up to 24 years if the young person is still in higher education or training.

The Guidance states that in terms of education the principles of good corporate parenting are to prioritise education, have high expectations, inclusion, change & challenge attitudes, achieve continuity & stability, early intervention (priority action) and listen to young people.

The term “looked after” refers to children who are subject to care orders and those who are accommodated by the Authority at the request of parents. Approximately 300 children are looked after in Kirklees and a further 90 are looked after on a respite care basis. The Panel heard that compared to other authorities there is a low number of looked after children in Kirklees but there is a higher level of Special Educational Needs among them.

How effectively the Council is educating its Looked After Children

The Panel considered statistical information which shows that looked after children in Kirklees are less likely than their peers in the district and nationally to attend school and to pass exams and more likely to have Special Educational Needs and be excluded from school.

Exam Results

Looked after children do not perform as well as their peers at all Key Stages and at GCSE level. Analysis of results for 2000/01 shows that there is a marked difference in the number of children, looked after continuously for at least one year by Kirklees Council, achieving the expected level in comparison with their peers in Kirklees and nationally. In 2000/01 and 2001/2 results at Key Stage 3 and GCSE were significantly worse, particularly among those living in residential care.

In 2000/01 and 2002/3 a small minority of looked after children were not entered for GCSEs or tested at the Key Stages.

The Government’s target is that 75% of care leavers will leave school with at least one GCSE at whatever grade by 2003/4. This should be met in stages, 40% by 2001/2 and 50% by 2002/3.

In 1999/2000 of 40 care leavers under this definition 9.8% achieved at least one GCSE at grade A*- G. In 2001 of 45 care leavers this figure was 29%. This compares with 37% for the whole of England. In 2001/2 this rose to 36% but was still below the Government’s target of 40%.

The problem with this indicator is that it includes young people who have been in care in Kirklees for a very short period of time e.g. bail support for a child never physically in care.

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Of 142 children at school age, looked after continuously for at least one year in 2000/01, 25.4% had Special Educational Needs. This is 9 times higher than the total figure for Kirklees (2.8%), the figure for England was 3.1%. In 2001 21 of them were educated in special schools. All of them had statements detailing the specialist help required for specific learning difficulties and/ or Emotional Behavioural Difficulties. In 2001 40% of looked after children had statements compared to 4% in the total school age population in Kirklees.

Half of those with SEN have behavioural difficulties and the majority are aged 14 plus and for those aged 10 plus SEN is more likely to be long standing and significant. 5% had SEN because of physical difficulties. As children come into care their Special Educational Needs have often not been addressed for various reasons resulting in delay in support being provided.

The extent of SEN among looked after children is not fully understood, an educational psychologist has been spending one day per week in Summer 02 conducting an enquiry. This is expected to reveal more SEN among looked after children as data was not previously collected on children in the earlier stages of the Code of Practice.

Absence from School

In 2001 2.8% out of 142 looked after children were permanently excluded from school compared to 0.12% in Kirklees and 0.11% in England. In 2001 19.7% of looked after children missed 25 days or more of school for various reasons such as temporary exclusion compared to 1% of pupils in Kirklees 0.7% in England. This figure was the same in March 02.

Stability and continuity of educational placements

Anecdotal evidence shows that young people in care in Kirklees change schools more often than their peers for a number of reasons. For example change of care placement, are wrongly placed in a school or do not fit in. It can take up to nine months to identify a placement. Of two young people in residential care one had attended 14 schools by the age of 15 years and the other 17 schools by the age of 16 years.

What happens after school?

In March 01 41% of 19 year olds who had been looked after at age 16 years were in employment, training or education. This had increased slightly to 41.7% in March 02. Under the Local Partnership Service Agreement, Kirklees is working towards the target "to improve the level of education, training and employment outcomes for care leavers aged 19".

Data Collection

Data available on looked after children in Kirklees is incomplete. Full SATs results were only available for 2000/01 and since the Panel began its investigations results for 2001/02 became available. Without data from previous years it is difficult to measure progress.

Information and evidence

Education of Looked After Children Support Team (ELAC)

The *ELAC Support Team*, established in April 1998 provides a range of support services to young people in care aged 5-16 yrs that are additional to mainstream services. The role of the Team is not to provide opportunities for education, but to support others to do this.

Prior to the existence of the Team awareness of the needs of looked after children had been low. Initially it had been used to deal with crisis. The Team is attempting to reorganise so that staff are used on a consultancy basis, making sure that others do what needs to be done & work is not “off loaded” onto the Team. For example, the Team is now making termly visits to all schools, including primary which enables more monitoring to be undertaken.

The Team has a role in planning with young people, target setting and working with the School Effectiveness Service. The ELAC Team has put in place a scheme to provide revision, tuition & homework support for year 11 pupils, which will be extended to year 10 pupils.

The General Manager, Children and Families (Social Services) stated that all looked after children should have access to mainstream education. The Panel heard that the LIFE project was created by Social Services as a response to an inability to find appropriate places for young people. The need for the project will be reviewed now that there are new requirements for young people to get a full time education, particularly at Key Stage 4.

The ELAC Co-ordinator stated that there is a dilemma, does the Team concentrate on those young people who are in extreme need e.g. have been excluded and who will never help the Authority to improve its Performance Indicators or those attending school with D, E, F grades, who with the right support could achieve A,B,C standard? The Team does not have the capacity to work with both groups.

The Panel was informed that in the past data tracking progress was patchy. There will always be gaps as not all young people take SATs, especially those in external placements. However schools now undertake yearly assessment of children and it is important to look at figures in the context of a cohort. Returns did not ask what children could achieve if they were unlikely to achieve GCSEs and did not reflect other achievements. There were indications that the Department of Health is considering value added performance.

The Team has total funding of £158 000 in 2002/3 which is drawn from the Social Services base budget, Quality Protects funding and the Education Standards Fund. There are 10 staff equivalent to almost 7 full time staff including a co-ordinator, education social workers, teachers and learning support workers.

The Panel heard that the Education Development Plan now recognises that progress of these children needs addressing and gives a commitment to put more money in.

The Pathway Team (Social Services)

The Pathway Team in Social Services works with 13-16 yrs and 16-25 yrs to prepare them for leaving care and to help them to focus on further education, training or employment.

It is having an impact but more could be done particularly for young people aged 13+ yrs. Quality Protects is funding a Connexions Adviser in the Pathway Team which is discovering a welter of unmet need. Normal adviser time spent with young people is 1.30 hours, time spent with looked after children is up to 3.30 hours. A new post in the Pathway Team will work with young people to achieve better outcomes. A part

time adviser will be employed to deal with unmet need in older looked after children initially and from January 2003 will support year 11 pupils.

The Panel heard that advisers from the Team are child centred rather than professionals of a particular discipline, they consider emotional issues and practicalities such as tenancy agreements and are proactive in helping young people take up training or go to college.

The Panel heard that the Team has harnessed the role of the Designated Teacher in school i.e. by supplying a list of these teachers to the Connexions Service. This assists the Careers Officer to target those over 13 years for additional support. The Panel was informed there is a need for younger children to receive additional support.

The Pathways Team is undertaking various initiatives to motivate and to raise the expectations of carers and young people e.g. Careers Fair focusing on year 9 pupils, and a pilot college course for young people to learn independent living skills is being developed. There is a need to concentrate on interpersonal skills so that they are prepared for and can sustain job placements. An employability scheme piloted in North Lincolnshire is being considered for implementation.

The current scheme of financial subsidy to enable care leavers to develop budgeting skills is a barrier to getting young people to attend college or take part in a training scheme. Kirklees pays its young people more than any other authority until they reach 18 yrs. A review is being undertaken with a view to introducing an incentive based policy.

The Panel was also informed that since care leavers aged 16-18 years are no longer entitled to social security benefit they do not have an automatic entitlement to a Kirklees Priority Passport. This means that they no longer qualify for Education Minor Award payments of approximately £360 per academic year from college funds to pay for books, materials etc.

Joint Working between Education and Social Services

In terms of co-operation between Education & Social Services, more work needs to be done strategically. Both the ELAC Co-ordinator and General Manager (Children's and Families Service) felt that they worked closely together, had ideas and were innovative. However it was acknowledged that progress is not being made quickly enough.

There is a need to engage with Education Social Workers, Careers Service, Psychology Service, Child/Adolescent Health and clear guidance on who is responsible for what is necessary.

The Panel heard that there is a need to consider overall strategy and for service areas to consider support. For example it was felt that Education Access should be aware who looked after children are in school and that its education social workers should monitor them on their weekly visit to school.

The Panel was informed that the guidelines document for the Council will be updated and rewritten by the end of December 02. It aims to demonstrate the Council's commitment and to communicate to all parties what is expected of them in respect of

the education of looked after children. The expectations set out are higher in the new version. It also includes new sections for the Family Placement Team, Educational Psychologist and Connexions.

The OFSTED inspection of Education Services in April 02 recommended that support for children in public care be improved by introducing a computerised joint database providing appropriate detail of all children in public care and affording ready access to their support workers.

Schools

The Panel was informed that the ELAC Co-ordinator is pursuing funding via the School Effectiveness Service for an amount for each looked after child per annum which will follow the child through school. Funding would be for all looked after pupils. Its purpose would be to release the designated teachers for training, to attend reviews, to liaise with other workers and to do paperwork in school. The ELAC Team would monitor use of this money to ensure that it is used for its purpose. Training for all designated teachers should raise standards to a baseline.

The DfEE Guidance states that designated teachers in each school who understand about care and the impact of care upon education are critical to tackling under achievement:

“Schools should designate a teacher to act as a resource and advocate for children and young people in public care. Local Education Authorities and Social Services Departments should co-ordinate suitable training for them and maintain an up-to-date list of designated teachers in schools in their area”.

A number of authorities give looked after children priority in their Schools Admissions Policy. This gives leverage and recognises that they need help to get into schools in the locality that are not over subscribed. There is a tendency to use schools that have a lot of difficulties and therefore not to put these young people in better environments.

The Panel was informed that many looked after children already have SEN status, are on the SEN register and get New Approaches type funding C (approximately £300 per year) or D funding (approximately £1,800 per year). Of 150 looked after children at school approximately 40 are presently on the SEN register.

Carers

The Panel heard that the expectations of carers need to be challenged with a view to helping to engage young people in education. There is a need to give carers support, assistance, guidance and feed back to do their job and to raise the profile of education with them.

Attendance at training events for fosters carers & residential staff has been low in the past but is improving now that it is built into the mainstream Social Services Plan. There is a need to follow this training through with work in home settings i.e. how will homework be supported, attendance at parents' evenings.

Informal exclusions from school are reducing as carers become more confident in challenging the reasons for exclusions by schools and training is provided.

The Panel was informed that a hand book for foster carers is being developed which includes educational issues. Some quality assurance across the different placements was necessary so that if a child is in care he/she will, for example, get help with homework.

The Panel heard that a mentor/ key person is necessary, someone who can give overall support all the time. Foster carers and key residential workers for those aged 13 years plus who live in Homes should undertake this role, for example by attending parents' evenings.

The Panel was informed that in residential care homes there are significant control issues. Children often stay out until 2.00 a.m.-3.00 a.m. and don't get up for school the next day. Peer pressure was also a factor. A Home cannot impose sanctions in the way that parents can e.g. withdraw spending money. There is a need for the Social Services Management Team to give clear guidance to staff. There is a need for the Children's Rights Service to assist staff by focusing upon responsibilities as well as rights.

A significant minority of looked after children (41) live at home with their parents and the Council has shared parental responsibility for them. Consideration is being given to the level of support (parenting skill support, counselling and mentoring for the children) they get from the Council. These children are more difficult to access and influence. Their parents struggle to finance equipment and kits. There is a small budget for equipment but parents who have already received something in one year do not always qualify for further assistance.

There are transport issues in terms of keeping children in a stable school placement. The existing £20 000 budget is insufficient and discussion is taking place. There is a tension between costs/ travelling long journeys and continuing to attend the same school after going into care and moving out of the area.

Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

Personal Education Plans were introduced 12 months ago by the Government and are intended to be a comprehensive educational record. All looked after children at school now have a PEP and they are now being introduced among 4 year olds.

DfEE Guidance states that *"every child and young person in public care needs a Personal Education Plan which ensures access to services and support; contributes to stability, minimises disruption and broken schooling; signals particular and special needs; establishes clear goals and acts as a record of progress and achievement"*.

There is a requirement to review a child's PEP every 6 months and it is reviewed at Care Plan review meetings. All workers, carers and the young person concerned are expected to attend. The Panel heard that half of young people do not attend the reviews and that designated teachers do not always attend although they will be required to now that funding attached to the role has been agreed.

PEP records are held by schools so that the designated teachers have easy access to update them, young people have to ask if they want to see them.

The Panel heard from the ELAC Co-ordinator that PEPs have not taken off as expected, that practice is variable and there is a need to make the PEPs more of a

live document. Training is planned for chairs of review meetings to ensure that PEPs are reviewed properly. The Panel was informed that the Education of Looked After Children Strategy Group should also have a role in monitoring PEPs.

The Panel heard that review meetings are daunting for young people due to the number of workers and professionals who attend because they have shared responsibility. The Panel heard from a teacher in the ELAC Team that he would try to attend only those parts of the review which were necessary.

The suggestions put forward by a young person include the need to make review meetings more young person friendly. The young person suggested that individual PEPs be made more accessible to young people.

Role of Elected Members & School Governors

The Panel noted that Elected Members should have a strategic role, driving forward improvements in services and giving looked after children a higher profile in the Authority. It was suggested an Elected Member should act as a champion for looked after children, acting as a link to other Members and that those who have a genuine interest should be harnessed.

The Panel was informed that a specific school governor role has been introduced as a way of raising the profile of looked after children in school. The ELAC Co-ordinator stated that Head Teachers should be asked to provide monitoring information as a separate issue in their statutory reports to governing bodies and this issue should be highlighted in Governors' newsletters.

Best Practice in Local Authorities

Information on practices in other authorities was obtained on the advice of the Department of Health which said it is difficult to identify good practice in terms of a whole authority approach. DfEE Guidance stated that there is little evidence of the spread of sustained good practice. Information was obtained from Stockport BC, Nottinghamshire CC, Buckinghamshire CC and Step Up 2000 in Derbyshire. Common themes are:

- strategic involvement of elected members and school governors
- children in public care have a high profile in the authority
- an Education Support Team or co-ordinator role, clearly defined roles, responsibilities and procedures
- good working relations among staff from various disciplines at all levels
- support for carers, designated teachers and social workers
- using data to identify needs and ensure early intervention e.g. at Stockport target groups are identified and intensively monitored so they are given every opportunity to prepare for forthcoming tests and exams
- young people having a say.

Views of Looked After Children

Discussion has taken place with six young people who are either presently in care or are care leavers. Two sessions were facilitated by the Children's Rights Service and

focused upon the experiences of young people and their views on what would make a difference to their education.

One care leaver surveyed a further 4 young people in residential care on behalf of the Panel and put forward suggestions based on a holistic education package.

These views are summarised in Appendix One.

They show that young people need support from their carers such as providing them with a suitable place to do homework, attending parents' evening, contacting school when there are problems and listening to young people.

Young people need support in the transition from school to becoming young adults, with further education or employment e.g. proper financial assistance when doing a college course. They need a stable, supportive environment at this time.

Young people in care need support from their schools and teachers to encourage them to attend, help them to catch up, prevent them from becoming excluded and moving schools often.

Views of Carers

The Panel met with one foster carer and two residential home workers to discuss the support they provided to young people attending school and how well they felt that the Authority supported them in this role. Their views are summarised at Appendix Two.

These carers provide young people with much practical assistance and support. The Panel heard that the relationship of carers with schools has improved greatly, that schools are showing more consideration for the difficulties they experience. However it was felt that schools should take more responsibility for young people excluded temporarily for example by providing appropriate work and tutoring.

The carers endorsed the role of the ELAC Team stating that they would like to see more study support and more training and information for themselves.

The Panel heard that Woodlands Reception Centre receives emergency admissions which should be for a 12 week period but can last 12 months. The Panel heard that there are problems in matching children to appropriate care placements as Homes are full and there is a shortage of foster carers. The Panel heard concerns that children do not receive enough social work support due to high turnover of staff and recruitment problems.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Panel concludes that the Authority is not educating its looked after children as well as it should be. The Panel feels that progress is being made but that there is much work still to be done to engage them in education as early as possible rather than when they are taking important exams which is felt to be too late. The Panel noted that there is a new statutory requirement that all young people should have a full time education at Key Stage 4. The Panel welcomed the fact that the Department for Health is considering value added performance as well as targets based purely on examination performance.

Strategic and Joint Working

Government Guidance stresses the importance of a “whole authority” approach and practical strategies for multi agency working.

Whilst there are examples of excellent work by workers, carers and schools the Panel feels overall looked after children have a low profile and that there are low expectations in some areas. The Panel recognises the excellent work being done by the ELAC and Pathway Teams but feels that they are working in pockets. For example the Panel heard that the Pathway Team works closely with the Connexions Service but not the ELAC team because the two Teams focus on different age groups.

The Panel heard that the Education of Looked After Team Strategy Group is not working effectively. There is an urgent need for this Group of Officers from Education, Social Services and the voluntary sector who have operational commitments to meet to consider overall strategy, direction and what Service areas are prepared to commit as part of the inclusion agenda.

The Panel stressed the importance of closer working with Schools and Head Teachers to reduce the number of looked after children who are excluded.

Recommendation: That an active Strategy Group should meet regularly, it should set out a clear strategy with objectives and monitor progress towards achieving this.

Corporate Parenting Role of Elected Members

The Panel noted that Elected Members have an important role as Corporate Parents. The Panel agrees with the principle of an Elected Member being a champion for looked after children. To show the importance of the role and to give it prominence it is felt that there should be a Job Description and an allowance, but with a selection process to ensure that an Elected Member with a genuine interest is appointed. This role would be the key link between Elected Members and Social Services/ Education Services and have a strategic overview, with a reporting line from the Strategy Group.

The Panel considered that training and information for Elected Members in their corporate parenting role is inadequate and felt that it does not focus on how Elected Members could undertake this role effectively. A key role of the champion would be to advise on how best this could be done.

Recommendation: That an Elected Member be appointed as champion to looked after children.

Education of Looked After Children Support Team

The Panel recognises the Team is undertaking valuable work with looked after children and recognises that it has an important role in co-ordinating provision of effective education for this group. The Panel is of the view that the Team is becoming more effective.

The Panel feels that a more effective Strategy Group would provide the Team with a basis for better links with mainstream services, help to clarify its role and to raise the profile of looked after children across the Authority. The Panel notes that an important role of the Team is to monitor and evaluate data, use it for earlier intervention and to target individual children for additional support and assistance.

The Panel noted that the Guidelines document which sets out the roles and responsibilities of the Team and Services is currently being reviewed and updated.

The Panel noted that the Team does not have sufficient resources to meet the needs of all looked after children referred to it.

Recommendation: That the Cabinet Members for Education and Social Services review whether existing resources are sufficient to enable the Team to meet the demands placed on it and that regular monitoring of the effectiveness of the Team with a view to improving outcomes be undertaken.

Funding attached to each child

The Panel supports the proposed bid by the School Effectiveness Service for funding for all looked after pupils to enable the designated teachers in schools to carry out their role. The Panel noted that the ELAC Team would monitor its use by schools. The Panel feels that only those teachers who have a genuine interest should undertake this role.

Recommendation: That this funding be used in Schools to develop the role of the designated teacher, with monitoring by the ELAC Team and that the experiences of learning mentors in schools be drawn upon.

The Panel noted that there is a high level of Special Educational Needs among looked after children and often this is not detected until late in their school years.

The Panel considered that there is a need for earlier intervention and felt that all looked after children should be entitled to SEN New Approaches funding "as of right" in order to tackle problems at an earlier stage with one to one help in the first instance such as baseline testing and help to catch up. This would also ease the burden on teachers and workers who have to collect evidence on individuals. This would not preclude looked after children from being assessed for further assistance if necessary.

Recommendation: That all Looked After Children be automatically placed on level one of the Special Education Needs Register, that New Approaches funding be identified for all looked after children "as of right" in order to tackle problems at an earlier stage, and that use of the funding in schools be monitored by the ELAC Team.

Schools' Admissions Policy

The Panel heard of the delays and difficulties in identifying appropriate school placements for looked after children which meant that some spent long periods of time away from school. The Panel considers that giving looked after children priority in the schools' admissions policy would give leverage and a recognition that they need help to get into a school. Although some looked after children have priority in

the admissions policy because they have special educational needs this only applies to those who have statements of needs.

Recommendation: That looked after children be given priority in the Authority's schools' admissions policy.

School Governors

The Panel welcomes the fact that school Governing Bodies are being asked to identify a Governor with responsibility for looked after children which should increase their profile in school and mean greater monitoring of their progress.

Personal Education Plans

The Panel welcomes the introduction of Personal Education Plans for all looked after children. However the Panel is concerned that half of young people do not attend review meetings.

The Panel recognises that it is good practice to review the PEP as part of the Statutory Review of the Care Plan because it gives a holistic and consistent approach to planning for the child. However the Panel feels that the PEP part of the review could be attended by only those professionals who have a responsibility for it.

Recommendation: That ways of making Personal Education Plans more accessible to young people be explored, in particular the language used and availability in disk or CD form, and that consideration be given to ways of making the PEP review meetings more young person friendly.

Transport to school

The Panel considers that the needs of the child in care are central and if it is in a child's interest to continue to attend their existing school then they should be supported to do so. However the Panel noted that transport across Kirklees by taxi is expensive and feels that consideration should be given to more cost effective ways of transporting such pupils. The Panel considers that carers should be given the option of a travel allowance to transport children in their care to school where carers are able to. This would be of benefit to looked after children.

Recommendation: That consideration be given to more cost effective ways of transporting pupils to school.

Carers

The Panel considers that the support systems in place for carers in terms of their role in supporting children's education are inadequate. The Panel considers that greater effort should be made to engage carers on education matters as it is part of their role. They should receive regular training and information on education matters and there should be active monitoring of attendance at any training events.

The Panel supports the views of carers that schools should take more responsibility for the young people it has excluded temporarily.

The Panel noted that while stability of care placements has improved overall, thereby contributing to continuity of education, there is room for improvement. The Panel heard that there is a shortage of foster carers and of placements in residential homes. The Panel noted that the assessment and placement procedure could be improved.

The Panel is concerned that foster carers and residential staff feel that they do not get enough support from social workers and that there is a lack of continuity of social worker involvement for young people. The Panel recognises that there are national recruitment problems.

The Panel noted the importance of young people having mentors in their care settings. The Panel noted that this role was filled by key workers in residential homes and foster carers.

The Panel has concerns about young people in residential homes staying out until the early hours (2.00 a.m. - 3.00 a.m.) but as Child Protection is not within the Panel's remit requests that the Cabinet Member for Social Services takes up this issue.

The Panel also feels that Sure Start and other statutory bodies who work with families should support parents to take up their educational responsibilities.

Recommendations: That more rigorous support systems be provided for foster carers and residential staff including regular information, training and monitoring to include support and training on how best to support young people in their school attendance and academic work.

That schools provide appropriate work as soon as a child is excluded from school and as soon as a young person enters an assessment centre.

That more focused support be provided when young people who have been excluded from school enter a new school.

Children's Rights Service

The Panel noted that the Children's Rights Service, a statutory service plays a valuable role in promoting the rights of looked after children through advocacy and support, and in increasing young people's participation. However the Panel heard criticism that the Service did not at the same time sufficiently promote the responsibilities of looked after children.

Recommendation: That the Children's Rights Service focus on promoting responsibilities as well as rights.

Financial Support for Post 16 Care Leavers

The Panel supports the review of the subsidy provided to young people to assist them to learn to live independently as it does not give them an incentive to take part in training or employment.

The Panel is concerned that since looked after children no longer have an automatic entitlement to a Kirklees priority passport they are no longer entitled to an Education Minor Award, funded by local colleges, to pay for books and materials.

Recommendation: That looked after children should have an automatic entitlement to Kirklees Priority Passports which would enable them to access Education Minor Awards from local colleges of approximately £360 per academic year.

Monitoring of Progress

The Panel feels that progress towards effective education of looked after children should be closely monitored and kept under review.

Recommendation: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be recommended to undertake a further short review in 12 months time to review progress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That an active Strategy Group should meet regularly, it should set out a clear strategy with objectives and monitor progress towards achieving this.**
- (2) That an Elected Member be appointed as champion to looked after children.**
- (3) That the Cabinet Members for Education and Social Services review whether existing resources are sufficient to enable the Team to meet the demands placed on it and that regular monitoring of the effectiveness of the Team with a view to improving outcomes be undertaken.**
- (4) That this funding be used in Schools to develop the role of the designated teacher, with monitoring by the ELAC Team and that the experiences of learning mentors in schools be drawn upon.**
- (5) That all looked after children be automatically placed on Level 1 of the Special Educational Needs Register, that New Approaches funding be identified for all looked after children "as of right" in order to tackle problems at an earlier stage and that use of the funding in schools be monitored by the ELAC Team.**
- (6) That looked after children be given priority in the Authority's schools' admissions policy.**
- (7) That ways of making Personal Education Plans more accessible to young people be explored, in particular the language used and availability in disk or CD form, and that consideration be given to ways of making the PEP review meetings more young person friendly.**
- (8) That consideration be given to more cost effective ways of transporting pupils to school.**
- (9) That more rigorous support systems be provided for foster carers and residential staff including regular information, training and monitoring to include support and training on how best to support young people in their school attendance and academic work.**
- (10) That Schools provide appropriate work as soon as a child is excluded from school and as soon as a young person enters an assessment centre.**
- (11) That more focused support be provided when young people who have been excluded from school enter a new school.**
- (12) That the Children's Rights Service focus on promoting responsibilities as well as rights.**
- (13) That looked after children should have an automatic entitlement to Kirklees Priority Passports which would enable them to access Education Minor Awards from local colleges of approximately £360 per academic year.**

(14) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be recommended to undertake a further short review in 12 months time to review progress.

Appendix One

Summary of Views of Care Leavers and Young People in Care

One young person did not get support from foster carers with homework, no private space (other younger children also in foster care), and had missed 2 GCSE exams due to a muddle over dates. One young person stated that young people in foster care should have access to a PC to do homework. One young person stated that his foster parents did not attend parents' evening. One young person stated that he often got praise from his foster carer.

Praise/ interest in school work by staff in residential Homes was mixed.

One young person was expelled from school and had not been entered for GCSE exams, felt that being in care had caused him to rebel. Prior to going into care his SATs results had been good.

One young person had attended 6 schools from the age of 11- 15 years, and had been excluded from one school. She had not attended regularly (staff at her residential Home had not forced her to attend), did not like school, always felt behind in the work & did not receive help to catch up. One young person commented that it was easy not to attend school as there was no punishment.

One young person had missed 7 weeks of school because of his circumstances. He had since caught up. Two of the young people were on a half day timetable and two had been paid to attend school.

One young person had experienced a lot of disruption whilst in care, moving from foster care to residential care, where he had been bullied to another residential home where he had not had a bedroom initially.

One young person stated that she had been in care for 7 years including a number of residential and foster placements and had attended 4 High Schools in Kirklees. She stated that she had felt left out in children's homes because she could not have the one to one attention she needed at times. At 11 years old her reading and spelling age was that of a 6 year olds. She stated that one to one attention from her last foster carers had made the difference. They had helped her with reading, checked her work, and ensured she got support at High School. She taken her GCSEs and was hoping to become a nurse. The foster carers had also taken her on holiday for the first time, trusted her with a key when they went away and continued to support her since she had moved out.

The young people did not see their social workers regularly and did not feel that social workers listened and responded to their needs. They stated that social workers always sided with foster carers and that they did not see the point in making a stage 2 complaint as it was a waste of time. Social Workers are regarded as part of the system and the young people did not feel that they could discuss their education with them.

One young person at secondary school had a mentor (not at school) who he felt he could discuss education with and who was very supportive. Members noted that all young people should have a mentor outside the system to discuss things with.

One young person said that he had worried greatly for 12 months about having to leave residential care at 16 years. He felt that Social Services had been anxious that he leave because he was costing them money and they wanted the space. He commented on lack of stability in residential care with adults coming & going and that it was different to living in a family as other young people were of similar ages.

One young person stated that Social Services had subsidised him to attend college as he did not qualify for Social Security. However he had not been fully subsidised, receiving money for food but no extras. He had been told by Social Services that he would not get full subsidy for the holiday periods because, as he did not go on holiday, he did not need it.

There is a low expectation of achievement by young people in care, particularly for those who leave school and join the LIFE project which is more of a social club.

The young people said that being in care affected their relationships with fellow pupils. One young person said that she had felt everyone was watching her, one had rebelled & made himself different. Others said that their classmates were understanding but it affected out of school activities such as sleepovers. One young person stated that she had been reluctant to attend school because she had been bullied as a result of being in care and having low self esteem.

The young people stated that they were keen to maintain contact with their families, visiting them regularly. One young person had spent a lot of time travelling to see her family who lives in another town at weekends.

Appendix Two

Views of Carers

The Panel heard from a foster carer that she ensured that children in her care attended school by taking them herself and if necessary sitting in class with them, but not all foster carers were prepared to. She stated that those permanently excluded from school did not get enough school work, nor support from the Authority and that she had to provide work herself. Two hours support a week, less the tutor's travelling time was not enough.

She stated that one child in her care had been excluded from school two days after starting and felt that, as a carer, she had not been given chance to work with the child and school together.

She had found it hard to help foster children with their school work once looked after children reached years 10 and 11. She had arranged for private tuition for one child but had been told that tuition had to be arranged by the Authority.

She stated that she had attended training sessions for foster carers run by the ELAC Team but that few foster carers had attended. In her view education was part of the foster carer role and foster carers were paid to do the job.

The Panel heard that in residential homes systems were in place to get young people to school and that staff liaised with teachers and the Education Support Team. Homes had a list of designated teachers. However if they did not want to go to school he could not be made to.

The Panel was informed that the relationship of carers with schools had improved greatly and that schools were showing more consideration for the difficulties experienced e.g. teachers had collected children for school.

The Panel heard that the Woodlands Reception Centre is not a settled, stable environment because it is a reception centre, receiving emergency placements and those in care for the first time. Although those admitted in an emergency should stay for 12 weeks while a placement is arranged, they often stay for up to 12 months. The Home is looking to change its profile. It was noted that there were problems in matching children to appropriate care placements as Homes are full and there is a shortage of foster carers.

A key worker in residential homes had responsibility for education e.g. liaising with schools and arranging for work when a child has been excluded. The staff were involved in PEPs, attended reviews, parents' evenings, and school activities, often with parents. This was part of the role of staff and written into job descriptions. In extreme cases, where a school was short of classroom assistants, arrangements would be made for residential or agency staff to do this on a short term basis.

Residential workers stated that they were pleased with the work of the ELAC Team in providing study support for year 11 pupils, now extended to year 10 pupils. Young people made an effort when the study support teachers came into Homes. Residential carers stated that they would like to be able to call upon tutors to teach those not attending school e.g. have been temporarily excluded or are in between

schools. The Team had provided staff with training on the Key Stages and the role of the designated teacher.

Carers stated that where young people were temporarily excluded the school should provide tutoring at home since the school is in receipt of funding for that place. Although staff did their best with young people they were not teachers and could not provide curriculum work.

Carers stated that Social Workers did not give residential and foster carers enough support. One child had three Social Workers in a year. Due to one Social Worker being off sick one child in foster care had not been seen by a Social Worker for 6 months when he should have been seen every four weeks. It was noted that this was due to high turnover and problems in recruiting social workers.

One carer stated that she would like an additional shift to be introduced in Homes from 9.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. with the priority for that shift being education and that an extra member of staff working these hours would make a difference to time given to individuals.

Appendix 3

Holistic Education Package For Young People In Care

- : Communication between all agencies
 - Carers (foster/residential)
 - Teachers, link person for YP's and school
 - Social Workers
 - Education Support Team
 - Pathway Team
 - Children's Rights Service
 - Connexions West Yorkshire
 - Other services working with YP's

- : Perhaps when a Young Person enters care a file* could be designed to identify every agency that has a hand in each Young Person's educational development, where all the responsibilities of each agency are detailed.

- : Each YP should receive a copy of this file/CD so they are aware of everybody's responsibilities.

- : How is this file moved as YP moves, consistent history.

- : Extra Curricular Activities and travelling arrangements to and from school.

- : Earlier introduction to Pathways so that when YP needs to use the service they are familiar with the staff. Careers advice and support at least from when GCSE's start, as that's when many people make careers decisions.

- : Homework support, access to computers/ adult assistance, responsibilities need securing so that YP knows where to go and their destination knows how to cater for their needs.

- : Regular, YP Friendly, reviews so that everyone is up-to- date, including YP.

- : When recommendations arise from this process, YP's need to be consulted, and other general issues that are part of the on-going process.

Responses to Education Questionnaire

AGE	13	16	16	15
TYPE OF CARE	Residential	Residential	Residential	Residential
LENGTH OF TIME IN CARE	2 years	10 months	4 to 5 years	4 years
No OF TIMES MOVED HOME	4	2	3	Twice
No OF SCHOOLS	2 secondary	17	5	14
When moved home, has this involved changing school	Yes	Yes	No	14
How did above make you feel	Happy I wanted to change schools	Mad	OK	Not bothered
DO YOU LIVE NEAR SCHOOL	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
HOW DO YOU GET TO SCHOOL	Walk	Bus	Bus	Taxi
How long does it take to get to school	15 minutes	15 minutes	20 minutes	One hour
IS EDUCATION IMPORTANT	No		Yes	

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT SCHOOL	Food	Maths	Science Lessons	Nothing
WHAT DO YOU DISLIKE ABOUT SCHOOL	Science	English	Dinners	Nothing
Do you see your school friends at evenings/weekends Are your friends welcome at your house	Yes	Yes	Sometimes and friends do visit	Yes
DO YOU EVER SKIVE FROM SCHOOL	Yes	No	No	Yes, sometimes
IF YES TO ABOVE, WHY	Because it's boring			It's boring
IF NO TO ABOVE, WHY		Because I always went to school even when I was ill	Because I like it	
ARE YOU INVOLVED IN ANY SCHOOL ACTIVITIES	No	No	Yes	Involved in sports and music
WHO SUPPORTS YOU WITH THE ABOVE	N/a	No one	School	
DO YOU HAVE ALL THE THINGS YOU NEED FOR SCHOOL	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

WHO BUYS EQUIPMENT FOR YOU	Mum	No one	Children's home	Get them from school
WHO DO YOU TALK TO ABOUT EDUCATION	No one		Nobody	Anyone
WHO SUPPORTS YOU WITH YOUR HOMEWORK	No one – don't do homework	No one	Staff at Children's home	Don't get homework
DO YOU HAVE ACCESS TO A COMPUTER	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
IF YOU HAVE ACCESS TO A COMPUTER, WHERE	At home and school	In the room at the Children's Home	Home	Children's home
WHO GOES TO YOUR PARENTS EVENING	Mum	No one	Staff and parents	Don't have them
DOES YOU SOCIAL WORKER TALK TO YOU ABOUT EDUCATION	No but I do have a social worker	No	Yes	No
WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO WHEN YOU LEAVE SCHOOL	Don't know	Yes, I have just left school and am doing a course which is what I wanted to do	College	Joiner
DO YOU TALK ABOUT	No		No	Yes with everyone

WHAT YOU WANT TO DO WHEN YOU LEAVE SCHOOL, WHO WITH				
IS THERE ANYTHING AT SCHOOL THAT HELPS YOU TO HAVE YOUR SAY?	No	No	Yes	
DO YOU GET INVOLVED WITH THE ABOVE	No	Yes	No	