

Item No. 10.	Classification: Open	Date: January 31 2008	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Looked After Children and Offending	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Strategic Director of Children's Services	

RECOMMENDATION

1. Corporate Parenting Committee notes the service provision for Looked After Children who enter the care system as a result of offending behaviour as outlined in this report.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. There are currently 587 children in care in the London Borough of Southwark. Of these, 4 are in care as a result of offending behaviour. It should be noted that very few children enter and remain in the care system for more than three weeks as a result of offending behaviour. Most children remanded into care by the courts have their cases heard within 3 weeks and return home.
3. Each year Southwark provides performance information relating to the offending patterns of Looked After Children who have been in care for over a year. Southwark's current performance (September 2007) shows we are performing above the national average of 9.6% of children looked after being convicted or warned. This year's return indicated that of 330 children over the age of 10 and looked after for a year or more (as at 30/09/07), 23 were convicted or warned concerning an offence (7%)
4. The care plan for each child looked after is reviewed at least twice a year and would be required to deliver specific sections relating to youth offending if:
 - a) it has been identified the young person is at risk of committing offences;
 - b) the young person has committed an offence and will require children's specialist services to provide necessary support to the courts (reports and interventions);
 - c) the young person is identified as committing significant levels of offending.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Partnership Southwark Youth Offending Team (YOT)

5. Southwark's YOT offers a comprehensive range of diversionary and early intervention services to support young people identified at risk of offending. This service is co-ordinated through Youth Inclusion Support Panels (YISPs), which are multi-agency bodies that identify support networks and meaningful activities for those at risk of offending.

6. Over 50% of children in care to the London Borough of Southwark are placed outside of Southwark boundaries and therefore require the support of their local youth offending services.
7. A joint protocol has been agreed with Southwark's Youth Offending Service, which outlines a number of support measures it would provide to children in care placed outside the borough.
8. Under this protocol, the YOT team will provide court reports for Looked After Children appearing in court. The YOT team will also, whenever possible, attend court for children placed outside the borough to ensure continuity and close communication with Children Looked After (CLA) Services. If this is not possible due to distance, Southwark's YOT service will liaise with the local YOT to ensure full information exchange and agreement on recommendations made to the court.
9. CLA Services work in partnership with Southwark YOT to avoid custodial sentences whenever possible. Research has shown that custody rarely improves outcomes for children. In the case of a child in care, custody can result in a placement disruption, which in turn impacts on the child's education and established support network.
10. Southwark's YOT has a well-established Risk Management Panel attended by all services involved with young people. This panel identifies the young offenders of most concern in the borough. Where a Looked After Child meets this criteria, they are subject to specific consideration, tracking and inter-agency planning provided by this body. This enables additional resources to be targeted in a co-ordinated way to break the cycle of offending behaviour and disengagement.

Remand Decisions

11. Young people in the community aged 15 or 16 years will ordinarily be remanded into custody where bail has been refused as a result of the seriousness of their offence.
12. However, where the YOT Officer and the Court assess a young person as vulnerable, they may be remanded into local authority secure accommodation. Any young person under the age of 15 years who is remanded for serious offences may similarly be remanded into secure accommodation. These placements are provided and joint funded by the Youth Justice Board.
13. Sometimes the family is not able or willing to accept the child back home after their appearance in court. In such circumstances the courts may remand a young person into local authority accommodation – such as a fostering placement or open residential accommodation - depending on the assessed needs of the young person.
14. The courts review this arrangement on a regular basis but sometimes it would be necessary for a child to remain remanded into local authority accommodation for several months until the final court hearing. During this period the young person is considered a Child Looked After and is transferred to CLA Services at the first review (week 4).
15. During the first four weeks the young person will receive an initial health assessment and educational planning intervention. Until the courts resolve the

matter, the child and their family will have an allocated social worker from both the YOT and CLA Services

Children in care who receive a custodial sentence

16. On occasion there may be children who are already in care who commit an offence and receive a custodial sentence. Government guidance has provided clarification that children subject to a full care order will remain the responsibility of the local authority during the prison sentence and will need to be subject to statutory reviews and on-going support. Children who are subject to Section 20 (voluntary accommodation) at the point of sentencing will not remain in care during the period of the sentence.
17. Both groups of young people require the support of the CLA Service at the point of prison discharge. Working in partnership with the YOT, a discharge training plan is developed prior to discharge and arrangements put in place for accommodation and support.

Placements

18. The YOT and CLA Services spot purchase placements that are able to offer appropriate supervision and management arrangements for young people who have committed serious offences. Foster placement is rarely deemed appropriate in such circumstances. Special arrangements are sometimes required for contact with the young person's family if the offence has involved younger siblings.
19. In some instances, a placement at some geographical distance from the young person's local community will be selected where the YOT and CLA Services are seeking to break a young person's connection/ involvement with local gangs.

Budget Allocation

20. The CLA Service and YOT both have allocated budgets for finding placements when needed.

Ongoing Support

21. There are a number of services which are targeted towards helping Looked After Children avoid crime or experience a positive rehabilitation following a custodial sentence. These are as follows:
 - Eligibility for a full leaving care service up to the age of 21 (if remanded into local authority accommodation for a minimum of 13 weeks having reached the age of 16);
 - Intensive support provided through the risk management panel;
 - Early intervention, parenting and positive activity programmes provided by the YOT Services' Early Intervention Team;
 - The developing role of localities/quadrants to target most vulnerable families;
 - The child-on-child abuse project developed in partnership with CAMHS;
 - Placement away from gang related activity where appropriate;
 - Southwark's YOT pro-actively working with YOT teams in child's placement locality;
 - Joint planning between YOT and CLA Services at point of prison discharge. Priority access, as a Looked After Child, to Southwark Education Placements,

within 20 working days.

Policy implications

22. There are no specific policy implications arising from this report.

COMMUNITY IMPACT STATEMENT

23. Youth offending is a significant concern for the community and is subject to considerable media scrutiny.

24. Southwark's CLA Services work to promote the five outcomes for Children in Care as outlined in Every Child Matters.

25. Young people who regularly attend school, undertake regular outdoor activities and have a secure placement are less likely to commit offences so it is important that resources are coordinated and targeted on those most at risk of offending.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

26. All children in care are subject to considerable placement expenditure. It is recognised that children who are charged with, or convicted of, significant criminal activity which results in courts remanding children into care, are likely to need specialist and more costly placements.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Director of Legal and Democratic Services

27. There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

Finance Director

28. There are no specific finance implications arising from this report.

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Romi Bowen, Strategic Director for Childrens Services	
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Version	Final	
Dated	January 22 2008	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Director of Legal and Democratic Services	Yes	Yes
Director of Finance	Yes	Yes
Executive Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional/Community Council/Scrutiny Team	January 22 2008	