

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 26 March 2008	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Speakerbox Update	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Strategic Director of Children's Services	

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Corporate Parenting Committee notes the progress of the Speakerbox action plan and the 'Tell it Like it Was' exit interview proposal as set out in this report.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The 'Tell it Like it Was' (exit interviews) are part of the action plan arising from the previous meeting between Speakerbox and Members in October 2007. The survey is designed to enable both the Speakerbox and Children's Services to gain a better picture of young people's care experience after they have left care.
3. The idea for the survey arose when Speakerbox and the Children's Rights and Participation coordinator identified a pattern amongst the 13—18 year age group in which young people found it easier to express their views on the service after they had left care. Those still in care, found it difficult to express their view on the quality of care they received, and felt it would be easier to talk about issues when they had moved on.
4. This is a concern for Children's Services, and further work will have to be undertaken through consultation, to identify barriers young people experience in making comments or complaints about their circumstances. If issues are not addressed quickly, they could impact on the future life chances of the child or young person. Developing a system which facilitates communication, and treats comments and complaints seriously, will also improve safeguards for children in care.
5. Speakerbox felt that children and young people often did not feel comfortable about raising issues while still in foster placements or felt too embarrassed to give a compliment. This problem was also evident in the way that young people were able to relate to other services they came in contact with.
6. Many young people reported that if a representation or suggestion was made about a service, the relationship between themselves and the service might be compromised. Many of the young people were more concerned about the possible consequences of making a complaint. Their biggest concern was that they would be moved to a new carer or allocated a different social worker.

7. Young people also found it difficult to give compliments and did not want to experience any embarrassment or awkwardness. Generally they felt it was better to keep quiet than to risk the unknown.
8. Speakerbox also felt that there was no place for a child or young person to praise or congratulate, and give something back to their carers when they thought their carers were “fantastic”, “wicked” or “bad “ (basically really good). As a result, Speakerbox developed the **Tell It How Was** survey, which many Local Authorities call exit interviews.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

9. Speakerbox envisages trained care leavers interviewing recent care leavers. Speakerbox met with a Children’s Services Training Manager on 11 February consider the training needs of the young people selected to undertake the survey. A questionnaire devised by young people would be used in the following ways:
 - One to one interview.
 - Telephone interview.
 - Email to speaker box e-address.
 - Letter box consultation.

How Would it Work?

10. The Independent Reviewing Officers (who chair child care reviews for children looked after) would ask the young person in their final review whether they would like to be involved in the Tell It How It Was interviews.
11. Speakerbox and the young person, facilitated by the Children’s Rights Coordinator, would arrange the Tell It How It Was interviews. Contact would be made three months after the young person had left care, which would give the young person time to reflect on their care experience and give more considered answers to the questionnaire.
12. Each young person (with their permission), would be contacted by a representative of Speakerbox to invite them to take part in an interview.

Issues for Speakerbox

13. Speakerbox believes the key issues will be recording of interviews and issues surrounding confidentiality, as young people do not want information shared and fed back to other young people.
14. Young people in Speakerbox presented the idea at the Trust for Adolescence
 - Teenagers in Foster Care: current practices-new debate Conference 21-2-06.
 - Children’s Rights Conference Newcastle 2006
 - Team Day Independent Reviewing Officers
 - Speakerbox had their own workshop to look at their idea.
 - The feedback was very positive.

Policy implications

15. This consultation is in line with the Children and Young People's Plan objective to improve the level of consultation and engagement with children and young people. It forms part of a wider strategy to build meaningful involvement of young people in shaping service delivery.
16. This proposal will provide training for young people. Young people involved in the project will gain knowledge in areas of; child protection and confidentiality. Additionally practical skills will be gained through the interviews such as; face to face and telephone recording skills, setting boundaries, health and safety anger management. A venue for venue for Speaker Box to meet young care leaver would also need to be identified.

Consultation

17. Consultation has taken place with a number of teams in Specialist Children's Services to get the views of professionals working with children looked after. The outcome of this consultation is in Appendix 1.

Expected Time Schedule	Dates
Speaker Box Team re final draft	4.3.08
Complete Team Meeting road show	30.3.08
Speakerbox Training	30.7.08

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Strategic Director for Legal and Democratic Services

17. No legal implications are arising from this report.

Finance Director

18. No comments sought as this will be financed within existing budget resources.

REASONS FOR URGENCY

19. This report is considered urgent as the Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC) are in the process of approving the Speakerbox action plan as considered at the 31 January meeting, with the Exit interviews being an item on the action plan which is the subject of this report. The Exit Interviews proposal needs approval of the CPC in order for it to be discussed at the joint meeting between Speakerbox and the CPC with the Joint Area Review inspectors.
20. Additionally the service delivery timetable for the exit interview proposal will be adversely effected should this report not be accepted at the CPC meeting.

REASONS FOR LATENESS

21. This report was not available for five clear days of notice as the Speakerbox

team needed to finalise the consultation process thus not allowing sufficient time for the report to be written.

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Outcome of consultation.

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Rory Patterson	
Report Author	Caroline Essiet	
Version	Final	
Dated	3 March 2008	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Strategic Director for Legal and Democratic Services	Yes	No
Finance Director	No	No
Executive Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional/Community Council/Scrutiny Team	March 2008	

Appendix 1

Speakerbox has presented the Tell It Like It Was survey at each of the following meetings.

Care Link Team Meeting 22-02-2008

- Great idea-helping the various business units evaluate their service.
- Service for CLA ends at 16years, Care link would forward information of the agencies post 16 years
- Team advised that asking young people to comment on all services may be too wide – suggested that make questionnaire/ interview open for young person to pick which service they wish to comment on.
- Safety of Speakerbox members when interviewing
- Travel – Many young people may not reside in Southwark
- Would be helpful not to interview young person in a Social Services building
- Training needs to be specific.

Foster Team Meeting 24-02-2008

- Great proposal in evaluating the service.
- Positive that young people will undertake interviews/questionnaires
- Setting appropriate boundaries
- Health and safety
- Emphasis on negative aspects of the service.

Unaccompanied Minors Team 23-02-08

- Great Proposal
- Lessons to be learnt from young people
- Positive message to both professional and young people - what we are getting right and what we need to work on
- technique of interview re language barriers, space for interviews, provision of written information
- Enquiries about why they are being interviewed, may be linked to immigration status.
- May need interpreters
- Speakerbox members need to be aware that the interviewees may want to please and – say what they feel is needed which again may be linked to immigration status
- May be difficult time for many of the young people as waiting for decision re immigration status.

Team 1 Adolescent and After Care 27-02- 2008

- Positive Proposal

- Safety of Speakerbox members recommendation - once names of young people to be interviewed are identified then Speakerbox member or Caroline should contact the teams to identify any health and safety issues.
- What would be the benefit to the young people
- Queries about feed back to teams and interviewee. How would this process work?
- Would the professionals be identified in the interviews
- Numbers of complaints may rise.