

<b>Item No</b> 6	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> March 26 2008	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Corporate Parenting Committee
<b>Report title:</b>		Update on White paper 'Care Matters: Time for change'.	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Assistant Director, Specialist Children's Services and Safeguarding.	

## RECOMMENDATION

1. That the corporate parenting committee note the progress in implementing the white paper, 'Care Matters: Time for Change' and the impact on Children Looked After.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The white paper has been developed in order to improve the experiences of children in care.
3. The white paper sets out the steps the Department of Children Schools and Families (DCSF) will take together with local delivery partners including schools, health services, and the voluntary sector, to improve outcomes for children and young people in care.
4. Improving outcomes for looked after children requires urgent, sustained action across central and local government, from practitioners in all aspects of children and young people's lives, and from their carers, friends and family.
5. Many of the commitments outlined in the white paper will become regulation following the approval of the children and young persons bill by parliament in late 2008.

## KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

6. The care matters white paper and subsequent commitments contained in the young persons bill will impact on upon how local authorities provide services to looked after children.
7. Outlined below are key elements of the bill:

### Social Work Practices

8. This is one of the more controversial aspects of the bill, and proposes some fundamental changes in how social work is organised and delivered. To improve outcomes the DCSF have developed a social work practice model which aims to provide greater stability and continuity for looked after children by giving social workers flexibility to deliver a more personalised service for children in care. To test this model, the DCSF has developed a range of initiatives which will be piloted across local authorities then evaluated before being officially rolled out.

9. The social work practice (SWP) model and pilots form part of the children and young persons bill which is currently before parliament. Once the bill has been approved by parliament, expected in summer 2008, between 6 and 8 local authorities will be selected to pilot the new model.
10. In order to establish the pilots the DCSF are developing tools and consultation measures to ensure rapid implementation of the pilots in the second half of 2008. Southwark will be engaged in the consultation process and learn from the pilots to strengthen service delivery to children looked after.
11. The DCSF are liaising with local authorities to develop the following tools to implement the SWP pilots;
  - A prospectus on social work pilots to share thinking with local authorities.
  - A financial model - to ascertain how much funding a pilot local authority will need to run the contract.
  - A contract specification and monitoring framework - This will describe how the social work practice and local authority will work together to deliver services for children in care, and provide recommendations and guidance on how the contract could be monitored by local authorities.
12. Independent agencies including the private and voluntary sector will be invited to run the pilots, to test how a new model of service delivery could be developed which could deliver improved outcomes for children in care.

### **Care Planning and Review**

13. The purpose of a care plan is to promote the child's welfare by ensuring that all agencies work together to meet the needs of the child. The bill includes new care planning regulations which will provide a clear, coherent and practical framework to enable practitioners and managers to undertake high quality care planning and reviewing to secure the best outcomes for the child. The additional requirements will:
  14. Improve the quality and stability of placements for children in care by restricting local authorities from placing out-of-authority
  15. Include a record of the child's wishes following visits to prospective placements, in particular where 16 and 17-year-olds are moving from a stable care placement to a less supportive placement such as an "independent" flat or hostel
  16. Help bring about greater educational stability by ensuring that children in care do not move schools in Key Stage 4, and increase the support available for children in care at school by putting the role of the designated teacher on a statutory footing.
  17. All local authorities currently employ independent reviewing officers (IROs) to ensure that care plans are developed, implemented and monitored. The DCSF is concerned that under current arrangements, the IROs are not providing enough challenge to local authorities to improve placement stability and secure access to essential services. In particular, there has been little evidence that the service has challenged local authority decision making, or exerted its independence, in relation to care planning.

18. Within the bill, the DCSF, has retained the option to remove IROs from local authority control and place them with an independent organisation such as the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS). The future of the service will depend upon the extent to which it is able to plan effectively for children and ensure local authorities act in their best interests at all times.

### **Higher Education Payment**

19. Local authorities will now be required to make financial payments to all care leavers who go on to pursue a course of higher education, as set out in their pathway plan.
20. The intention is to set the payment at a minimum for £2000 for students starting courses from 2008. The local authority may be able to provide additional support over the £2000 minimum. For example, students on longer courses.

### **Visiting**

21. Currently all local authorities must arrange for all looked after children to be visited by a representative and for that representative to be available for advice, support and assistance when needed.
22. To ensure local authorities are maintaining effective contact with children in care, the regulations have been extended so children in all placement types receive a minimum of one visit in the first week of placement, then every six weeks for the first year and that the child should be seen alone.
23. Additionally the bill will ensure that 'independent visitors' are now available to a wider group of looked after children rather than only those out of touch with their birth families. Independent visitors are employed by voluntary organisations which are independent of the local authority. Historically, they have been used to visit children and young people who do not have contact with their birth families. This new requirement will ensure that all children who need one, can have an independent visitor, so that that can have someone to talk to who can act as an advocate on their behalf or just listen to their concerns and provide support and advice.

### **Fostering**

24. To improve safeguarding the bill will ensure appropriate and continuing supervision of children in long term residential placements made by health and education services and give foster carers access to an independent review mechanism and introduce a private fostering registration scheme and amending the procedures for reporting on child deaths.

### **Designated Teacher**

25. To improve educational outcomes of Looked After Children there will be a statutory requirement for schools to appoint a designated member of staff who will have the responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of looked after children. The key responsibilities will be:

- Ensuring the school has a record of all looked after children who are pupils at the school;

- Taking lead responsibility for raising the attainment of looked after children at the school by identifying their additional learning needs, putting in place appropriate teaching and learning provision and monitoring their progress;
- Contributing to the looked after child's personal education plan (PEP), ensuring that it is up-to-date and reflects their educational needs and is available for the local authority's 6 monthly review of the child's case;
- Helping looked after children who are pupils at the school to contribute to their own PEP;
- Ensuring that arrangements are in place to obtain the pupil records from the child's previous school and that they are handed on to any school the child transfers to;
- Contributing to the in-service training and development of staff; and liaising with external agencies to help ensure wider support is available to remove the barriers to the educational progress of looked after children.

### **Policy Implications**

26. The care matters white paper reinforces the priorities and objectives set out in Southwark's children and young people's plan to improve outcomes for children in care.

### **Community Impact Statement**

27. The initiatives outlined in this report are being developed to improve the quality of care and support provided to Looked After Children. The care population predominantly comprises some of the most vulnerable children in the community, and includes proportionate numbers of children from black and minority ethnic groups. The Bill sets out to narrow the gap between the life chances of this group and the general population in the community.

### **Resource Implications**

28. The Council has received an additional £396k in the Area Based Grant from the DCSF for 2008/09 to implement Care Matters. Work is currently underway to identify how best this would be deployed to support the service. However, there will clearly be significant financial implications arising from the need to provide additional support to care leavers, higher education payments, and the extension of the independent visitors scheme to include all children looked after.

## **SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS**

### **Strategic Director for Legal and Democratic Services**

29. No legal implications are arising from this report.

## Finance Director

30. No comments sought

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Care Matters: Green Paper	<a href="http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/conResults.cfm?consultationId=1406">http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/conResults.cfm?consultationId=1406</a>	Melissa Collins, Department Co-coordinator; 020 7525 0404
Children and Young People Bill	<a href="http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2007-08/childrenandyoungpers onshl.htm">http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2007-08/childrenandyoungpers onshl.htm</a>	Melissa Collins, Department Co-coordinator; 020 7525 0404

## APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Care Matter: Time for Change Government White paper Please refer to <a href="http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/timeforchange/">www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/timeforchange/</a>

## AUDIT TRAIL

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<b>Report Author</b>	Melissa Collins, Department Co-coordinator	
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<b>Key Decision?</b>	No	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments included</b>
Strategic Director for Legal and Democratic Services	Yes	No
Finance Director	No	No
<b>Executive Member</b>	Yes	Yes
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