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| TITLE | Looked After Children Review - Monitoring of Recommendations |
| FOR CONSIDERATION BY | Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 13 January 2014 |
| WARD | None Specific |
| STRATEGIC DIRECTOR | Pauline Maddison, Interim Director of Children's Services |

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

- The full range of outcomes for children in care
- Improved life chances for children in care
- Improved recruitment and retention of foster carers.

RECOMMENDATION

1. To note the report and the completion of tasks against the recommendations of the overview and scrutiny task and finish Group
2. To receive updates on work to improve the service offer and outcomes for children in care and care leavers via an annual report from the Corporate Parenting Board.

SUMMARY OF REPORT/ WIDER CONTEXT

1. The overview and scrutiny task and finish group reviewed the offer to children in care via a review of policy and by interviewing a small sample of foster carers and staff. A series of recommendations were proposed to officers.
2. The recommendations were considered and a report was submitted to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee; the majority of recommendations were incorporated within the Corporate Parenting Board Strategy and Children in Care Strategy which had been in development during the life of the task and finish group.
3. The Corporate Parenting Board has strengthened its approach to critically review the outcomes for children in care and the services designed to support the delivery of them.
4. The Corporate Parenting Board receives an annual report from the Children in Care Council on the delivery of The Pledge. The reports for 2012 and 2013 are attached at Appendix 1 and 2. The latest results were pleasing and suggested that services are focussed appropriately and children in care's needs broadly are being met.
5. The Corporate Parenting Strategy and Children in Care strategy will be refreshed in line with the business plan and the Corporate Parenting Board will complete this work by March 2014.

6. The summary report presented is an update on the specific recommendations that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee made; it shows that most of the recommendations were already part of the then emerging Strategy or incorporated into it. The report also shows that the approaches highlighted by the Overview and Scrutiny report have been implemented.
7. Since the report was completed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee the Fostering Agency has been inspected by Ofsted in January 2013 and judged 'good'. The inspection documented the improvements delivered (see Appendix 3).
8. The Wokingham Pledge for Children in Care, the Charter for Care Leavers and the Foster Carers' Charter are attached (see Appendices 4 – 6)
9. The Corporate Parenting Board completes an Annual Report and will incorporate into its business planning cycle the submission of the report to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee in addition to the Full Council Meeting from April 2014.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

| | How much will it Cost/ (Save) | Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall | Revenue or Capital? |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Current Financial Year (Year 1) | N/A | | |
| Next Financial Year (Year 2) | N/A | | |
| Following Financial Year (Year 3) | N/A | | |

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

N/A

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services and priorities?)

Corporate Parenting is a Cross-Council Agenda.

List of Background Papers

The appendices to the Corporate Parenting Board reports are available on request.

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| Contact Judith Ramsden | Service Children's Services |
| Telephone No 01189 746205 | Email judith.ramsden@wokingham.gov.uk |
| Date 27th December 2013 | Version No. v2 |

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Report – Recommendations and Update 2013.

| | Recommendations | Status/update | Comments |
|---------------------------|---|---|--|
| (a) Basic services | | | |
| 1 | That School Governing Bodies be asked to designate a governor with responsibilities to monitor and check on progress of any Looked After Children in the school | Delivered by governor services | Included in the annual programme/priorities of Governor Services. |
| 2 | That in schools, the member of staff with responsibility for Looked After Children (CIC) needs to make themselves known to the Looked After Children, and to ensure other members of staff are aware of their responsibilities. The Looked After Children need to know the role of the Virtual Head teacher . | Delivered by Head teacher for CIC | Designated teacher: Included in the annual programme/priorities and list of reporting responsibilities of the Head teacher for CIC; report on progress to Corporate Parenting Board via Children in Care Council (CICC) report on delivery of the Pledge. |
| | | Delivered by Head teacher for CIC | Looked After Children " know the role " of the Head teacher: Included in the annual programme/priorities and list of reporting responsibilities of the Head teacher; report on progress to Corporate Parenting Board via Head teacher and CICC. |
| 3 | The Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) undertakes more liaison and benchmarking with other Local Authorities with a view to mutual sharing of best practice, for example the Children's Rights Officer could liaise with Bracknell Forest Borough Council to discuss ideas around the development of the Children-in-Care Council; and Officers and Members could visit the Ealing Horizons Project. | Business as usual of CPB | Outward looking approach now business as usual across service; benchmarking data requirement included in CPB report card. |
| | | | Children-in-Care Council (CiCC) have continued to look at other CiCC for ideas; the CiCC have own work plan supported by officers. |
| 4 | That the Corporate Parenting Board report annually to Council to demonstrate the progress made in implementing the Corporate Parenting Strategy. | Delivered by CPB | Delivered. Reporting cycle will be extended to include annual report to Children's Overview and Scrutiny committee. |
| (b) Foster Carers | | | |
| 1 | That in order to ensure clarity of communication; consistency of message; and to set accurate expectations, more detailed and explanatory written material should be provided for foster carers. | Delivered by Wokingham Fostering Agency | Foster Care Handbook revision completed. Forum with foster carers established. Innovation Project with foster carers and service established. |
| | | Delivered | Wokingham version of the Foster Carers Charter has been implemented. |

| | Recommendations | Status/update | Comments |
|----|---|--|---|
| 2 | That senior officers meet regularly with a selection of foster carers to discuss any concerns they may have. | Embedded by Wokingham Fostering Agency | Foster Care Steering Group established. |
| 3 | That ways are found to be able to check that all foster carers are clear about finance and how allowances can be spent. | Completed | Foster Care Allowance Scheme reviewed with foster carers. |
| 4 | That foster carers be asked whether they would like a Foster Carers' Association to be formed. | Considered-not pursued (number of carers insufficient) | |
| 5 | That a 'compact' be produced to make clear what is expected from both the Council and foster carers, the content of which should be formulated as a joint document between Council officers and foster carers. | Delivered by Wokingham Fostering Agency | Subsumed by the Foster Care Handbook and foster carers charter |
| 6 | That robust plans are kept up to date and full details of what is in the care plan be shared at the start of every placement, with honesty around what would be involved in placements and full details should be given. Foster Carers should be asked about their experience of care plans. | Operational practice standards in place / business as usual. | |
| 7 | That a professional working relationship between foster carers and social workers is maintained with both sides viewing the relationship as a partnership, | Business as usual. | This is accepted practice and forms part of the revised 'Foster Care Handbook'. Work has continued to strengthen / support role of Supervising Social Workers within the Fostering team. |
| 8 | That all foster carers are made aware of the respite care scheme and how it operates, and of what out of hours support is available. | Implemented | This is accepted practice and forms part of the revised 'Foster Care Handbook' . |
| 9 | That training be tailored to foster carers' needs, following an enquiry as to what they require; and there should be dedicated training for foster carers to allow for networking opportunities, and that officers liaise with other Local Authorities such as Bracknell Forest Borough Council about specialised/specific training for foster carers, to share and save costs. | Delivered | This is accepted practice and forms part of the revised 'Foster Care Handbook'. Training offer strengthened for foster carers: Positive feedback received from foster carers regarding improved training offer. |
| 10 | That support is given to foster carers as to how they can develop aspirations and self-esteem and educational, emotional and spiritual needs of the young people in their care. | Business as usual | Access to support via formal training via supervising social work; via access to CIC psychologist. |
| 11 | That social workers provide more guidance to the looked after children. | Business as Usual | This is accepted practice and forms part of the revised 'Foster Care Handbook'. |

| | Recommendations | Status/update | Comments |
|---|--|---|---|
| 12 | That a mentoring programme for new foster carers be set up. | Implemented | New carers are linked to experienced carers by FPT. Buddying system established. |
| 13 | That investigation be made into how foster carers can be given more freedom to decide what activities Looked After Children can take part in, and whether there can be a presumption that foster carers are allowed to do what they want unless there is a specific reason not to. | Business as Usual | This is accepted practice and forms part of the revised 'Foster Care Handbook' . |
| 14 | That it is made clear to all what level decisions can be made regarding all aspects of the care of Looked After Children. | Business as usual | This is accepted practice and forms part of the revised 'Foster Care Handbook |
| 15 | That there should be more and regular between the foster carers, young people and the Virtual Head teacher. | Delivered by Head teacher for CiC. | Included in the annual programme/priorities and list of reporting responsibilities of the Head teacher for CiC. |
| 16 | That consideration should be given to involving foster carers in evaluating social workers, possibly by giving feedback in a 360 review, and social workers should participate more fully in the appraisal of foster carers. | SW appraisal model is due for review in 2014/15 | As part of standard operational practice SW's need to contribute to reviews of foster carers, this has continued to be prioritised, aiming to achieve 100% feedback. In terms of f/ carers contributing to appraisals of SW- the model of appraisal for SW is scheduled for review in 14/15 and this aspect will be considered / incorporated as appropriate. |
| (c) The Council as Corporate Parents | | | |
| 1 | That a strong message be given that Corporate Parents should view all Looked After Children as they would their own. | Delivered by Corporate Parenting Board | This is part of WBC's 'Pledge' to CiC and the recent care leaver's charter; delivered through presentations to Full Council. |
| 2 | That there is an annual training session for all Councillors to remind them of their responsibilities as Corporate Parents, with consideration being given to the preparation of an information booklet on their role. | Delivered/ on track. | Training was offered in 2012/13 for CPB; and dates are being secured for March 2014. |
| 3 | That it be investigated whether Councillors should be the point of contact for foster carers in their ward and provide a link to WBC. | Complete | Protocol agreed by CPB. |
| 4 | That consideration be given to setting up a similar Christmas present scheme for care. | Delivered by Corporate Parenting Board | Implemented / achieved |
| 5 | That Members be encouraged to be more involved, with invitations to the Awards and Fun Days being sent early and if possible the date printed in the Council diary. | Corporate Parenting Board - actioned | Implemented / achieved- albeit take up across the Full Council remains low. |

| | Recommendations | Status/update | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | That the Pledge is renewed annually, all Members are given a copy and the Mayor signs it at a full Council meeting. A copy of each page of the Pledge should be displayed. | Delivered by Corporate Parenting Board | Now included in the annual evaluation of how well the 'Pledge' has been delivered. CiCC survey underpins the annual report. |
| (d) Care Leavers | | | |
| 1 | That all parts of the Council be encouraged to recognise their Corporate Parenting responsibilities, and services be asked how they can support our Looked After Children. | Corporate Parenting Board Complete | Training was offered in 2012/13 for CPB ; date being secured for march 2014. |
| 2 | That consideration be given to preparing an information booklet for care leavers giving details of the services provided for them; with information similar to that given by the Ealing Leaving Care Service book. | Complete | . |
| 3 | That the Children-in-Care Council look to develop the ideas for events similar to the Ealing Horizons Shout Out sessions. | | Considered but not actioned by the CiCC |
| 4 | That the facilities at the Children & Young People Resource Centre at 46 Church Road, Woodley should be further developed with additional support for skills and independent living. | Complete | Implemented / Achieved in Partnership with CiCC. |
| 5 | That, if not already organised, the Looked After Children Team should hear a talk from Ben Marson on what support the Prince's Trust can give. | | Considered but not actioned. |
| (e) Provision for Care Leavers' Housing Needs. | | | |
| 1 | That Tenant Services formalise how care leavers' needs are considered and provide that information to Looked After Children, Personal Assistants, social workers and housing officers. | Arrangements in place | Report due on impact April 2014 |
| 2 | That consideration be given as to which services/teams, from other departments as well as Children's Services, should be involved in working with the Children-in-Care Council, on the implementation and review of the Pledge; for example there could be liaison with the Housing Department. | Arrangements in place. | Strategy involving close liaison and support from the Housing Department has been put in place; to be monitored by the Corporate Parenting. |
| 3 | That the Pathway Plans include reference to the use of the safety net of Floating support, when support from Children's Services ends. A housing officer should be invited to attend meetings. | Delivered by here4u and housing needs team. | Implemented |
| 4 | That the use of the furniture recycling scheme be encouraged, as this is what most young people starting their new home expect to have to do. | Arrangements in place | Implemented |

| | Recommendations | Status/update | Comments |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| 5 | That the Council plans to increase the supply of supported lodgings. | Work in Train | Remains a priority. Strategy involving close liaison with and support from the Housing Department has been put in place; to be monitored by the Corporate Parenting Board. Impact report due to CPB by March 2014. |
| 6 | That consideration is given to increasing the leaving care grant from £1,200 to £2,000, and that the use of the resettlement grant is investigated. | Corporate Parenting Board - delivered | Implemented – leaving care grant increased to £1,500 with discretionary £500 available 12/13; from April 2014 will increase to £2000. |
| 7 | That Tenant Services consider decorating properties when care leavers move in. | Arrangements in place | Strategy involving close liaison with and support from the Housing Department has been put in place; to be monitored by the Corporate Parenting Board. |
| (f) Looked After Children and Care Leavers' Views | | | |
| 1 | That personal assistants are proactive in offering and providing help and assistance to care leavers. | Business as usual | Oversight of care leaver pathway plans strengthened 2013/14. |
| 2 | That the new Connexions worker is more proactive in giving information and explanations about jobs and college courses, etc. | Business as usual | Close working in place between here4u, Connexions service (now called Adviza) and Head teacher for CIC. |
| 3 | That questions for Looked After Children to social workers and Personal Assistants are responded to in a timely manner and the Children clearly understand the time frame involved. | Business as usual | This is accepted practice and is part of the 'Pledge' (and this is evaluated annually). |
| 4 | That social workers and Personal Assistants clearly communicate to Looked After Children the reasons why something is happening or not happening. | Business as usual | This is accepted practice and is part of the 'Pledge' (and this is evaluated annually). |
| 5 | That Looked After Children proposing to enter higher education are provided with details of the Access to Learning Funds that might be available to them. | Business as usual | This is accepted practice and is part of the 'Pledge' (and this is evaluated annually). |
| 6 | That IT provision should be reviewed regularly and systems should be in place for Looked After Children to report problems, | Delivered by Head teacher for CIC | This is accepted practice and is part of the 'Pledge' (and this is evaluated annually). |
| 7 | That the Council makes clear to Looked After Children what its policy is when birth parents refuse to co-operate with the Council over their property. | Accepted part of SW practice | |
| 8 | That early screening should be in place for potential health/developmental problems, such as dyslexia, which might need to be followed up, and relevant guidance given to foster carers. | Delivered by Head teacher for CIC | |

TITLE Children in Care Pledge

FOR CONSIDERATION BY Corporate Parenting Board

DATE 11 December 2012

REPORT PREPARED BY Teresa De Vito
Service Manager
Safeguarding and Quality Assurance

SUMMARY

This report outlines the progress made in delivering the Children in Care pledge. The report provides an update on the key areas defined within the pledge, and outlines next steps for Members' consideration.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to provide an update for Members on progress in delivering the Children in Care pledge.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Board is asked to:

- Note the progress made on the delivery of the Children in Care pledge.
- Advise of any areas which require more detailed information

List of Background Papers:

Wokingham's pledge to children in care, internal reports of performance, and results of questionnaire sent to children in care.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 requires local authorities to produce and publish a pledge to their children in care.
- 1.2 Wokingham's pledge to its children in care was written by the Children in Care Council in consultation with other children in care and care leavers, and approved by the Council's Corporate Parenting Board in 2011. A copy of the pledge is attached at Appendix A.
- 1.3 The pledge covers a wide range of activities and aims, divided into six key areas:
- Give you a home where you belong;
 - Help you have a healthy lifestyle;
 - Make sure you get an excellent education;
 - Listen to and value your opinions;
 - Ensure you have fun; and
 - Help and support you on the road to adulthood.
- 1.4 The assessment of progress against the pledge is undertaken using a variety of measures. These include formal performance indicators, quality assurance undertaken through management supervision of workers, IRO feedback, audit analysis and meetings with key professionals involved in individual cases.
- 1.5 A key element of the assessment process is seeking the views of children in care themselves on their experiences and how they feel the pledge is being met. As a result, a large number of the aims in the pledge will be assessed this way. A questionnaire to capture the views of children in care has been undertaken, and the results analysed.
- 1.6 2011/12 is the first full year of the pledge and this report provides an update on progress and includes details of performance indicators and the views of children in care on the services provided to them.

2 GIVE YOU A HOME WHERE YOU BELONG

- 2.1 This section of the Pledge covers those areas that link to placements for children in care. There are aims and objectives in relation to contact, (this can mean contact with family and friends, and contact with professionals) relationships with social workers and carers, plans and changes.
- 2.2 As at the end of September 2012:
- 83% of children (aged 4 or over) and young people participated in their reviews

- 11 (15.3%) of children in care are cared for by friends or relatives
- 2.3 There is a focus on the production of good quality care and pathway plans and these are shared with children in care. Children are encouraged to actively participate in the development of their plans. Plans are reviewed as part of the supervision process with social workers and are audited and signed-off by managers. Pathway planning meetings are held with the young person and partner agencies where appropriate, and the Here4U resource base has recently been renovated to create a child/young person friendly environment where meetings can take place.
- 2.4 Children in care are introduced to carers before a placement wherever possible, and this is monitored through supervision and through the LAC Review if a planned move. Independent Reviewing Officers have started (IROs) to monitor this through the reviewing process and more feedback will be available in the end of year report. As part of the ongoing management of cases, social workers are made aware of the expectation to build meaningful, positive relationships with children in care. Exit plans are agreed within supervision for workers who leave the department in a planned way.
- 2.5 A contact schedule is part of the care plan for children in care and is reviewed regularly within casework supervision and by the IRO as part of the reviewing process.

3 HELP YOU HAVE A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

- 3.1 This section of the Pledge covers areas linked to health advice and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. It covers ease of access to nurses, GPs and dentists; supporting the young person in accessing wider health advice groups and services.
- 3.2 All new entrants to the care system are registered with a GP near their placement and whenever there is a placement move.
- 3.3 All children are provided with contact details for the LAC nurse on entering care. At the initial health assessment, the nurse has age appropriate conversations with the child about their health needs; signposting to other services as required. Younger children then have a developmental check every 6 months, with older children having an annual health check. Current monitoring shows that around 8% of young people have an outstanding health assessment and 11% an outstanding dental assessment.
- 3.4

| | Health Assessment | Dental Assessment |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|
| Recent entry to care awaiting first assessment | 2.7% | 9.7% |
| Date arranged for next assessment | 5.5% | 0% |
| Young person has refused assessment | 5.5% | 0% |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Assessment within time scales | 80.8% | 88.9% |
| Late assessment | 5.5% | 1.4% |

- 3.5 During the LAC Review process, IROs will check that children and young people have access to health and dental checks. Managers will ask social workers about the timeliness and quality of health provision during supervision sessions and senior managers will review the data on health checks on a weekly basis.
- 3.6 The Hear4u team organize weekly Health & Wellbeing drop in sessions for LAC and care leavers. The CAMHS team also run regular sessions at Hear4u; both meeting young people and discussing therapeutic interventions to offer to young people with high scores in their Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire.
- 3.7 All social workers are available to accompany children in care to health appointments; alternatively they can arrange for another suitable person to do this if the young person prefers.

4 MAKE SURE YOU GET AN EXCELLENT EDUCATION

- 4.1 This section of the Pledge covers schooling, educational support from carers and Wokingham Borough Council, celebrating achievement and maximizing a young person's potential to achieve in adult life through having had a robust education.
- 4.2 The Head Teacher for Looked After Children attends the Personal Education Planning (PEP) meetings held in schools, challenging the schools around the child's educational targets and any additional support required by the child.
- 4.3 Where appropriate social workers will try to ensure a child continues to attend their current school but in cases where this is not felt to be in the child's best interest, changes of school will be addressed through the PEP process and LAC Reviews. No looked after child in Key Stage 4 or above can change school without senior manager approval.
- 4.4 Social workers and schools will use a range of ways to praise young people for any educational achievements, commenting on and recognising the support of carers in such success. Wokingham also holds a very successful Awards Day for looked after children to celebrate their achievements.
- 4.5 Support for a young person's career aspirations and subject choice is provided and monitored through the PEP process for children of statutory school age, and through Pathway Plans for school leavers and young people attending college. Currently all young people either have a PEP in place or know the date of their next PEP.
- 4.6 All older children in care and care leavers have access to a Connexions adviser to help them move into adult life. Additional support is offered to young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) through the provision of accredited training.

- 4.7 All children in care are provided with access to a computer at home; with children aged 11-18 being provided with laptops to help them with their homework, college choice or job hunting. This provision is monitored through the PEP/Pathway planning process.

5 LISTEN TO AND VALUE YOUR OPINIONS

- 5.1 This part of the Pledge covers the various ways in which “the voice of the child” is heard throughout their care pathway and how this is incorporated into the planning process for each child or young person.
- 5.2 All children should be allocated both a social worker and an IRO on entering care. As far as possible, these relationships are maintained throughout the child’s care pathway. These ongoing relationships, supported through both the visiting and review processes, should encourage the young person to make their views known to a trusted professional.
- 5.3 Children’s views should be heard through the LAC review process with statistics reflecting that 83% of children over 4 years of age take up the opportunity to complete consultation forms. However this process can be intimidating for some of the more vulnerable young people, so IROs will be encouraging children and carers to think creatively about views. This may be in the form of a poem or a DVD. IRO’s aim to meet with all children and young people before their review to consult them on their views and establish how they want their views represented in the meeting.
- 5.4 If a child has a disability which impacts on their ability to communicate, arrangements are made to reflect the child’s views in a different format.
- 5.5 An allowance guide has been produced to ensure young people, their carers and social workers all know the agreed rates for pocket money, holiday plans, birthdays etc.

6 ENSURE YOU HAVE FUN

- 6.1 This part of the Pledge covers young people’s activities out of school, encouraging them to create an achievements folder for recording their successes.
- 6.2 The care planning and PEP processes can identify activities the child/young person wants to participate in, providing resources as appropriate to support the activity. Frequently the foster carer is well placed to know about local clubs and courses, but the social worker supports them in this and can signpost the family to other council services such as children’s centres and youth services.
- 6.3 Looked after children are treated as full members of the carer’s family, taking part in family trips and holidays. This is supported through the care planning process.
- 6.4 Not all children in care are placed in families or establishments with the same culture or religion as the child’s home background. The care planning process supports children in celebrating cultural festivals appropriate to their background

and supervising social workers from the Placements team can assist with providing support and advice to the carer.

7 HELP AND SUPPORT YOU ON THE ROAD TO ADULTHOOD

- 7.1 This part of the Pledge covers support available to young people who are preparing to leave care, or who have recently left care.
- 7.2 All young people have a Pathway Plan to assist in their transition to adulthood which is specific to each child. It can cover a disabled child's transition to Adult Services or a care leaver's transition to managing their own financial and accommodation needs. The plan includes details on how the young person will be supported both financially and with advice.
- 7.3 Connexions workers attached to the Hear4u team support young people to find the correct course for their career plans, provide accredited training if the young person finds themselves not in education or training and are actively involved in the creation of the Pathway Plans (which are monitored through review and supervision meetings).
- 7.4 Within a Pathway Plan young people will have a housing plan which is reviewed at the Young People's Housing Panel; similarly young people requiring support from Adult Services are supported through the Continuation Panel.
- 7.5 All young people are provided with their National Insurance number before their 16th birthday; this is either done by the foster carer or the social worker, depending on a young person's circumstances.
- 7.6 During the Pathway Planning process, any opportunities for work experience are discussed and implemented. A "Care to Work" strategy is being rolled out in Wokingham.
- 7.7 The Pathway Plan also addresses the young person's transport needs; either funding driving lessons or ensuring they are confident users of public transport, depending on their circumstances.
- 7.8 Young people should have a passport before leaving care, or understand why they cannot have one.
- 7.9 Children in care and recent care leavers will know who to contact if they need support or advice. This will be detailed in their Pathway Plan and last LAC Review.

8 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- 8.1 Within the pledge, there are a number of performance indicators that are used to measure progress. These are relatively few in number; as the Pledge has a focus on qualitative measures and to capture the views of the children in care themselves.
- 8.2 A list of indicators, along with the performance at the mid-year stage, is included at appendix B.

9 QUESTIONNAIRE TO CHILDREN IN CARE

- 9.1 Monitoring the Pledge is one of Wokingham's Children in Care Council (CICC) objectives in their Terms of Reference. To do this, the CICC agreed to produce a questionnaire that would be given out at the Awards Day on 6 October 2012, and posted out to all carers who did not attend, asking them to support their children in filling in the questionnaire.
- 9.2 An incentive of a £10 voucher was offered to each young person who returned the completed questionnaire by 12 November 2012. After a small return it was agreed to post the questionnaire out directly to the children and young people. This resulted in doubling the return of questionnaires.
- 9.3 The CiCC wished their report to be the direct responses of the young people to each question and therefore these have been collated and are included at appendix C.

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 The Board is asked to:
- Note the progress made on the delivery of the Pledge for Children in Care.
 - Identify any areas which require more detailed information.

Wokingham's Pledge

What is Wokingham's Pledge?

The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 means that Wokingham and other local authorities have to write down a list of promises to their children in care to make sure they are good corporate parents. This list is called Wokingham's Pledge and was written by the Children in Care Council in consultation with other children in care and care leavers.

What does Wokingham's Pledge promise to do?

We will only promise you things we know we can do.
We will be honest with you at all times.
We promise to keep you safe.

Give you a home where you belong and:

- Try and provide a placement of your choice.
- Give you information about any home you are moving to.
- Introduce you to carers beforehand, unless it is an emergency move and have introductory visits.
- Fully involve you in plans made for your future promoting your involvement in planning meetings and reviews providing you with all minutes and reports from meetings you attend.
- Help you understand your past and why you are in care including doing life story work with you.
- Help you keep in contact with your family and friends providing a contact schedule that you will be given and if any contact with someone is not possible then give you a clear reason why.
- Help you build a photo album of important people in your life and places you have been while in care and provide you with a 'treasure box' to keep all your special papers and possessions in.
- Care and plan for you as an individual person involving you in decisions taking account of your particular needs, especially those relating to your age, interests, disability, race, culture, religion and sexuality.
- To ensure you have an up to date Care Plan.
- To ensure that when your social worker stops working with you they say a proper goodbye and whenever possible introduce you to your new social worker.

Help you have a Healthy lifestyle and:

- Provide you with contact details for a named nurse specifically involved with Children in Care.
- Make sure you are registered at a Doctor's.
- Provide you with access to information on all health issues.
- Make sure you have regular dental and health check-ups.
- Point you towards specialist groups and drop-ins.
- Accompany you to appointments if you wish.
- Do everything possible to make sure you've got the skills and knowledge to keep yourself healthy and happy now and in the future.

Make sure you get an excellent Education and:

- Make sure that you have a place at a school that will help you to do your best.
- To ensure you remain at the same school but if this is not possible to involve you in the choice of your new school.
- Take an active interest in what you do at school (e.g. attend parents' evenings).
- Support you in your education plan and in subject/career options.
- Encourage and if necessary help you to do your homework.
- Celebrate your achievements.
- Provide you with a range of learning opportunities.
- Ensure every child in care or young person has access to a computer and safe access to the internet.
- Provide computers for post-year-11s in full time education including those in further and/or higher education.
- Ensure we help you reach your potential with qualifications, training or courses to choose your future path.
- Ensure you have copies of school reports.

Listen to and value your opinions and:

- If you have a disability make sure that you have your own 'communication passport'.
- Involve you in decisions and plans made about you and make sure you understand them.
- Make sure you are involved in your reviews.
- Offer you the opportunity to talk to your Independent Reviewing Officer before your review and give you their contact details.
- Offer you the opportunity to be involved in participation and consultation groups such as the Children in Care Council.
- Make sure you know who is responsible for you (including your corporate parents) and how to contact them.
- Give you a timely response to any enquiry or request.
- Make sure you have the opportunity to talk to your social worker alone every time he/she visits you and know how to contact them.
- We will make sure you know your rights and what services you're entitled to.
- You will have clear information and support about how to access all the help you need, including advocates, making complaints and contacting directors of children's services.
- We will be honest with you.

To ensure you have fun and:

- Encourage you to take part in at least one leisure activity of your choice.
- Provide information on local activities and events.
- Support you to access sport and leisure facilities.
- Help you record your achievements by providing an 'Achievement folder' for every child in care.
- Take an active interest in your hobbies and celebrate your achievements.
- Involve you in activities/holidays with your carers.
- To give you the opportunity to go on a school holiday.
- Celebrate dates that are important to you including birthdays and religious festivals.

Help and support you on the road to adulthood and:

- Give you good preparation and planning for when you leave care, by providing information and advice, including drop-ins and groups.
- Ensure you have your national Insurance number by your sixteenth birthday.
- Find you work experience placements.
- Help you find and settle into a new home emotionally, financially, securely and safely.
- Help you access adult services if you need them.
- Ensure you have access to an NHS dentist.
- Make sure you can afford bills and rent if you are in low paid employment and support in financial difficulties.
- Help you learn to drive and be confident in using public transport.
- Help you make the most of your chances for training, further education and employment including identifying funding.
- We will make sure you have an up to date passport or understand the reasons why you don't.
- If you get in trouble with the police we will make sure that the right adult is there to offer you help.
- Ensure you have a detailed Pathway plan.
- Ensure you have a Personal Advisor from your 16th birthday.

APPENDIX B – PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

| Pledge | Indicator | Performance (as at end of September) | | Comments (where appropriate) |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|---------|--|
| | | % | Numbers | |
| Give you a home where you belong | | | | |
| Being fostered with a friend or relative | % of LAC in Friends & Family fostering | 16.4% | 12/73 | |
| Placed for adoption | % LAC in adoptive placement | 5.5% | 4/73 | |
| Make sure you get an excellent education | | | | |
| Make sure that you have a place at a school that will help you to do your best | % of LAC of school age who have a school recorded | 86.0% | 43/50 | New indicator, reported for the first time. Data in the process of validation/quality assurance. |
| Support you in your education plan and in subject/career options | % of LAC with completed PEPs (age 5-15) | 95.0% | 38/40 | |
| Help you have a healthy lifestyle | | | | |
| Make sure you are registered at a Doctor's | % of LAC with GP recorded | 68.5% | 50/73 | |
| Make sure you have regular dental and health check-ups | % of LAC with dental assessment completed (includes refusals where relevant) | 88.9% | 64/72 | |
| | % of LAC with health assessment completed (includes refusals where relevant) | 91.8% | 67/73 | |
| Listen to and value your opinions | | | | |
| Make sure you are involved in your reviews | % of LAC participating in reviews | 78.1% | 57/73 | |
| | % of LAC with an allocated worker | 100.0% | 73/73 | |
| Make sure you have the opportunity to talk to your social worker alone every time he/she visits you and know how to contact them | No of visits where LAC seen alone (this figure does not count follow up telephone calls when the young person has not been seen alone during a visit. Nor does it count the discussion between the IRO and the | 66.7% | 293/439 | |

| Pledge | Indicator | Performance (as at end of September) | | Comments (where appropriate) |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|---------|---|
| | | % | Numbers | |
| | young person prior to any LAC Review.) | | | |
| Help and support you on the road to adulthood | | | | |
| Ensure you have a detailed Pathway plan | % of LAC aged 16+ with pathway plans | 57.1% | 12/21 | New indicator, data being collected for the first time. First run of data has revealed some anomalies. These are currently being worked through |
| | % of LAC aged 17+ with pathway plans | 80.0% | 8/10 | |

APPENDIX C – QUESTIONNAIRE TO CHILDREN IN CARE

34 Young People Filled in a questionnaire

Age 9-(2) 11-(2) 12-(2) 13-(4) 14-(1) 15-(1) 16-(5) 17-(5) 18-(4) 19-(4) 20-(2) 21-(1)
23-(1)

Do you have a copy of the Pledge? Yes – 19

No – 2

Answer Missing – 13

Do you think all the promises in the 'Where you live' section (page 5) have been kept?

Yes – 26

- Yeah it is all good to be honest I enjoy where I am living at the moment
- Yes everything is great I'm HAPPY!

No – 5

- I'm not sure which one I just believe that they haven't been kept
- On a couple of occasions I haven't been able to say a proper goodbye to social workers and have not been introduced to a new one!
- Introduce you to carers beforehand
- Promised laptop on 10th October by social worker, its now 16th.
- Try and provide a placement of your choice
- Give you information about any home
- Really involve you in plans made for your future providing your involvement in
- Providing you with minutes and reports from meetings you attend
- Treasure box

Do you think all the promises in the 'Your Education' Section (page 6) have been kept?

Yes – 27

- Yeah I am going to college at the moment and its going great.
- Except my laptop

No – 5

- When I did go to school they wasn't supportive, what I wanted we had to push the school for. College is great.
- Don't remember to be honest

N/A – 2

- I don't go school
- No because I was never given a laptop even when I was at college and

know one has been there part from my foster carer.

Do you think all the promises in the 'Your Health' Section (page 7) have been kept?

Yes – 30

- Kind of, could be a little better organised
- Yes my health is great

No – 4

- I'm unaware of my nurses name
- Contact details
- I wasn't told about some groups

Do you think all the promises in the 'Your Activities' Section (page 8) have been kept?

Yes – 31

- Yeah I am going every week to cinema and bowling
- I didn't take activity but that's my choice, I have been asked
- I did have riding lessons which I love but the money has ran out now. And do have for other activities apart from riding.

No – 1

Do you think all the promises in the 'Your Voice' Section (page 9) have been kept?

Yes – 27

- I speak for myself and other as I am apart of the Children in Care Council.

No – 5

- Give you a timely response to any enquiry or request
- Timely response - no definition 6 weeks or 6 months as a whole social services have an issue over giving any sort of timely response!
- We will be honest with you, meaning not to beat around the bush still with no straight answer, saying it how it I much more appreciated instead of hearing half the story
- Except my carers
- Things are sometimes hid from me that i find out through someone unexpected
- Make sure you know who is responsible for you
- Make sure you know your rights
- Had to wait for staff to be back from holiday etc for a response

N/A – 2

I don't understand 'your voice'

Do you think all the promises in the 'Becoming an adult' Section (page 10) have been kept?

Yes – 24

- Yes sort of it has been ok and beneficial
- Point 3 – find you work experience

No – 7

- Still waiting
- I don't know
- National insurance number has not been provided. Social worker has been told about this a lot of times and nothing has been done since April to November. Please sort this out as this is important to me
- Point no 7. I don't feel as if I was supported with financial help as I was independently finding benefits to support me when I was in further education.
- Point 11. I didn't feel like I was given any help regarding police fines and ended up having to sort that out independently, I feel that there could be a more efficient way for care workers to communicate with authorities if a child is in trouble.
- Need more information about transition and options available locally
- Don't have a personal advisor
- Insurance number not had, didn't check passport was in date, don't have a personal advisor
- Point 4,1,7,9,10 and 11 –No Struggling to maintain my home, don't feel I'm prepared to stop being a Care Leaver at 21; wanted support at court, ended up with something on my record as I didn't even have a solicitor, feel I need more support with my studies e.g. tutor, had to argue I was entitled to an up to date passport, pathway plan not detailed enough

How do you think the pledge has helped you?

Yes - 4

Comments –

- Allows me to know what things I can expect from you
- By providing a framework for positive intervention which is inclusive
- I feel I have more rights and that I can challenge my social worker if I feel I'm not receiving what I should have been entitled to and can offer information to others who aren't aware
- Its helped me realise that my corporate parents can do a lot more to support me when I feel it is lacking
- Gave me somewhere to live
- What pledge?

- Yes because I can see what should be going on
- It helps to know what the social worker SHOULD be doing
- Yes, its showed me what I am entitled to and what can happen
- It has made people follow a set of rules made by the children themselves, even though a few have been broken
- Yes to a certain degree
- I get a lot more support if I need it
- It has helped me to know you are there to keep promises
- Every time pledge has helped me thanks
- It has helped me a lot because I can look back to keep reminding myself and my social worker of what has been planned for the future
- Yes I think it has helped me in the parts that apply to me
- It has made me understand what I am entitled to, based on where I live, education etc
- It helps me to know what I am entitled to
- The Pledge has helped me with useful facts / information about leaving care and starting a new life into adulthood
- The Pledge hasn't helped me as much but other young people have said it has helped them
- Very good
- I can have my say and having people to help you in your health and where I live
- By helping and supporting me with the things I need
- It has helped me to know what my carers should always be doing and it is lots more than I thought
- It has helped me with my confidence and by helping me with my independency
- Yes because it tells me a bit more information about it
- Wokingham is not breaking the rule
- It gives you information about it

Are there any promises that you think should be added to the Pledge?

No – 23

Comments –

- Priorities around personal safety such as reporting procedures
- No but the national insurance number issue should have been dealt with. Issues should be dealt with in a time period and not drag on and on
- No, I think that it's very informative and that its available for everyone to understand
- Provide internet access at home to support your studies
- Assess and review Care Leavers individual needs as you would a CiC
- Not kick you out on your 18th birthday, let you stay in Care
- Provide gym pass
- Provide bus pass / train to support education
- Make a separate Pledge for Care Leavers
- Ensure child / youth is happy

- That if you wanted to stay on you can and be happy
- Financial support for expensive clubs

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| TITLE | Officer Report on the Delivery against the Children in Care Pledge |
| FOR CONSIDERATION BY | Corporate Parenting Board |
| DATE | November 2013 |
| REPORT PREPARED BY | Lynne Adams Judith Ramsden Barbara Sorkin |

SUMMARY

This report sets out how well we have delivered against the Children in Care pledge. The report provides an update on the key areas defined within the pledge.

A significant amount of data is collected to help us monitor the life chances and well-being of the children in our care, which falls outside of the Pledge. We monitor placement moves closely, both within the year and over the longer term to ensure that children and young people are not being made to move unless it is in their best interest. Education attainment (using Fisher Family Trust expectations) is monitored to test the suitability of current schools to inform the agreement of future education plans between a range of professionals. This is currently thriving and is helping to develop future plans for all looked after children.

There are no significant shifts in the age, gender or ethnicity profile of our children in care (CIC) over the past year. We had an increase of CIC in the last 12 months; but as at _ or CIC in population had returned to the average range.

The stability and skill of the workforce is important in enabling us to deliver on the pledge. At the midyear headlines there was:

- an improvement in the proportion of the children's social work workforce who were directly employed staff rather than agency workers (increase from 62% at 30.09.12 to 75% at 30.09.13)
- a reduction in rolling 12 month sickness absence per full-time equivalent employee (from 9 days at 30.06.13 to 6 days at 30.09.13)
- a reduction in rolling 12 month Social Work Services staff turnover from 27% at 30.06.13 to 24% at 30.09.13
- increased focus on undertaking mandatory training. In summary: the pledge has been delivered against.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to provide an update for Members on delivery against the Children in Care pledge.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Board is asked to:

- Note the progress made on the delivery of the Children in Care pledge.
- Advise of any areas which require more detailed information

List of Background Papers:

- Wokingham's pledge to children in care, internal reports of performance, and results of questionnaire sent to children in care.
- CICC report to the CPB Nov 2013
- Mid-year analysis of the impact of the Recruitment and Retention Strategy for social workers

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 requires local authorities to produce and publish a pledge to their children in care.
- 1.2 Wokingham's pledge to its children in care was written by the Children in Care Council in consultation with other children in care and care leavers, and approved by the Council's Corporate Parenting Board in 2011. A copy of the pledge is attached at Appendix A.
- 1.3 The pledge covers a wide range of activities and aims, divided into six key areas:
- Give you a home where you belong;
 - Help you have a healthy lifestyle;
 - Make sure you get an excellent education;
 - Listen to and value your opinions;
 - Ensure you have fun; and
 - Help and support you on the road to adulthood.

In 2012, as a result of the CICC's feedback the CPB agreed to create a separate pledge for care leavers. The Care Leavers charter was adopted by the Council in July 2013. The CICC have decided to formally ask care leavers about our delivery against the charter in 2014 and this will be presented to the CPB at that point.

- 1.4 The assessment of progress against the pledge is undertaken using a variety of measures. These include formal performance indicators, quality assurance undertaken through management supervision of workers, IRO feedback, audit analysis and meetings with key professionals involved in individual cases.
- 1.5 A key element of the assessment process is seeking the views of children in care themselves on their experiences and how they feel the pledge is being met. As a result, a large number of the aims in the pledge will be assessed this way. A questionnaire to capture the views of children in care has been undertaken, and the results analysed.

2 GIVE YOU A HOME WHERE YOU BELONG

- 2.1 This section of the Pledge covers those areas that link to placements for children in care. There are aims and objectives in relation to contact, (this can mean contact with family and friends, and contact with professionals) relationships with social workers and carers, plans and changes.

- 2.2 This area of the pledge has been a critical priority over the last 12 months. The impact of the work has been 8 children were placed with family and friends carers. 5 Family and friends carers were granted either Residence Order or Special Guardianship Orders. 4 children were placed for adoption with final orders granted and 1 child placed with adopters order not yet granted. 5 children matched and placed permanently with long term foster carers. 3 children placed with in-house carer's long term, match and approval to take place December 2013. The new approach to permanency planning will remain a focus for the coming 12 months.
- 2.3 As a result of the Jan 2013 campaign 3 foster carer households have been recruited and 9 applicants are currently going through the assessment process. The 'Skills to Foster' preparation group which ended 16th October was attended by 8 enquirers. All carers have a Profile which is shared with children before placement and where-ever possible visits to potential carers are arranged prior to a child being placed.

Contact with Children's policy was reviewed September 2012 and 'Contact with Birth Families' training is provided to highlight that foster carers play a crucial role in supporting children's relationships with their birth family. This training gives participants an opportunity to explore research findings and contact issues in order to empower Foster Carers in their support of the children they care for and the contact with their birth families.

A contact schedule is part of the care plan for children in care and is reviewed regularly within casework supervision and by the IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) as part of the reviewing process.

There is no previous data available but currently 71% of open contacts have consistent contact schedules in place and expectation is that all the looked after children will have a schedule in place and to be aware when their contact takes place.

- 2.4 There is a focus on the production of good quality care and pathway plans and these should be co-produced with children in care. Plans are reviewed as part of the supervision process with social workers and are audited and signed-off by managers. The IRO service will now remain involved for agreed periods of time with the care planning and reviewing process for young people who may require some additional support post 18 when they are no longer "looked after by the local authority".
- 2.5 As at the end of September 2013:
- 95.3% of children (aged 4 or over) and young people participated in their reviews
- 2.6 The IRO Notification process in line with IRO Handbook 2010 requires all IRO services to have a clear and agreed Notification Process. This enables IRO's to challenge issues pertaining to the Local Authorities Care Plan if there is concern of delay or the plan not meeting the needs of the young person. This process has been embedded across the service over the last 12 months, for the benefit if the children in care.

The work to further improve our delivery against the Sufficiency Duty, to ensure we have sufficient high quality foster care placements continues. We have partnered with a specialist agency to reconfigure aspects of our recruitment and retention of foster carers that takes forward the good work already in place and recognised in the January 2013 Ofsted inspection of the Fostering Agency.








3 HELP YOU HAVE A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

3.1 This section of the Pledge covers areas linked to health advice and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. It covers ease of access to nurses, GPs and dentists; supporting the young person in accessing wider health advice groups and services.

3.2 All new entrants to the care system are registered with a GP near their placement and whenever there is a placement move. As at _
97.4%. Are registered.

3.3 All children are provided with contact details for the LAC nurse on entering care. At the initial health assessment, the nurse has age appropriate conversations with the child about their health needs; signposting to other services as required. Younger children then have a developmental check every 6 months, with older children having an annual health check.

3.4

| | Health Assessment | Dental Assessment |
|--|---|---|
| Recent entry to care awaiting first assessment | 1.3%  | 6.7%  |
| Young person has refused assessment | 0%  | 0% |
| Assessment within time scales | 89.3%  | 50.7%  |
| Late assessment | 9.3%  | 47.2%  |

3.5 During the LAC Review process, IROs will check that children and young people have access to health and dental checks. Managers will ask social workers about the timeliness and quality of health provision during supervision sessions and senior managers will review the data on health care. CIC are provided with leisure passes to enable them to access leisure activities at Loddon Valley leisure centre at reduced cost. CIC can also access soft play areas. CIC are involved in a range of activities which include swimming, bike riding, canoeing, music, football, horse riding, cubs/scouts, and dance and youth club activities.

An additional and new tool to help social workers improve on the delivery of this aspect of the pledge is an automated prompt in advance of every Looked After Child visit detailing the child/young person's last dental/optician's appointment, enabling them to monitor and ensure that assessments are within timescales.

- 3.6 The Hear4u team organize weekly Health & Wellbeing drop in sessions for LAC and care leavers. The CAMHS team also run regular sessions at Hear4u; both meeting young people and discussing therapeutic interventions to offer to young people with high scores in their Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire.
- 3.7 The CAMHS worker meets with the social worker and any other relevant professionals as deemed necessary to discuss individual cases and agree actions/referral pathways as well as holding informal group sessions regarding a variety of topics.
- 3.8 This year's work included promoting "Stoptober" (stop smoking month in October) with literature available and advice regarding stopping smoking, Chlamydia workshops with testing kits available for use and information on counselling and drug awareness to help equip young people with knowledge; strengthening their resilience.
- 3.9 All social workers are available to accompany children in care to health appointments; alternatively they can arrange for another suitable person to do this if the young person prefers.

4 MAKE SURE YOU GET AN EXCELLENT EDUCATION

- 4.1 This section of the Pledge covers schooling, educational support from carers and Wokingham Borough Council, celebrating achievement and maximizing a young person's potential to achieve in adult life through having had a robust education.

The Local Authority is still working hard to close the attainment of LAC compared to the overall school population.

All CIC are, if deemed necessary, supported in schools by tuition in small groups or on a one to one basis. WBC also provides additional funding for one to one external tuition, if required, to pupils in years 6 and 11 during the final years of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4-GCSE. During the last academic year, one pupil at Key Stage 2 and four pupils at Key Stage 4 received additional tuition. The impact of this additional funding had a positive effect on three of the pupils.

- 4.2 Home tutoring was offered to a small number of CIC; whilst school placements were scored and or the child was experiencing medical difficulties.
- 4.3 The Head Teacher for CIC attends the Personal Education Planning (PEP) meetings held in schools, challenging the schools around the child's educational targets and any additional support required by the child.
- 4.4 All CIC who were statutory school age in the last 12 months were on school rota.
- 4.5 There were no permanently excluded pupils who were CIC.

- 4.6 Where appropriate social workers will try to ensure a child continues to attend their current school but in cases where this is not felt to be in the child's best interest, changes of school will be addressed through the PEP process and CIC Reviews. No CIC in Key Stage 4 or above can change school without senior manager approval.

8 pupils were required to change schools because of change in foster care placement and a smaller number due to educational reasons.

- 4.7 Social workers and schools will use a range of ways to praise young people for any educational achievements, commenting on and recognising the support of carers in such success. Wokingham continued to convene the Awards Day for looked after children to celebrate their achievements, the events in 2013 was the most well attended thus far.
- 4.8 Support for a young person's career aspirations and subject choice is provided and monitored through the PEP process for children of statutory school age, and through Pathway Plans for school leavers and young people attending college. Currently all young people either have a PEP in place or know the date of their next PEP. CIC have a PEP review every term.
- 4.9 Parents Evenings – All carers are expected to attend parent's evenings, school assemblies and school events where possible and appropriate. The regularity of such events varies between schools. Attendance at parents' evenings is recorded on the PEPs, or carers have attended.

Our carers have achieved 100% attendance for children that they care for who are educated in the maintained sector; for those in the independent sector carers and representatives go to the independent schools as/when required.

- 4.10 All children in care are provided with access to a computer at home; with children aged 11-18 being provided with laptops to help them with their homework, college choice or job hunting. This provision is monitored through the PEP/Pathway planning process.
- 4.11 All pupils of secondary school age and all students in further education were provided with a laptop in 2012/13. An evaluation of this provision indicated that the greatest use was at Key Stage 4 and 5 for individual studies.

5 LISTEN TO AND VALUE YOUR OPINIONS

- 5.1 This part of the Pledge covers the various ways in which "the voice of the child" is heard throughout their care pathway and how this is incorporated into the planning process for each child or young person.
- 5.2 All children in care have been allocated a social worker and IRO upon entering care and the 100% performance target has been achieved throughout the year. These on-going relationships, supported through both the visiting and review processes, should encourage the young person to make their views known to a trusted professional.

- 5.3 Children's views should be heard through the CIC review process; statistics reflect that 83% of children over 4 years of age have participated with the LAC review process according to the national definition. Locally we hand out consultation forms.

However this process can be intimidating for some of the more vulnerable young people, so IROs will be encouraging children and carers to think creatively about views. The number of consultation forms received back from children is currently only 18% this figure is from April 2013 – September 2013. Although this figure is low the high percent of children who attend their CIC reviews or meet with the IRO's separately off sets this and attendance and engagement in the meeting is a valid indicator of full engagement. The consultation forms will be available electronically by January 2014 and it is hoped that this will increase the numbers of children who complete and return.

- 5.4 If a child has a disability which impacts on their ability to communicate, arrangements are made to reflect the child's views in a different format.
- 5.5 An allowance guide has been produced to ensure young people, their carers and social workers all know the agreed rates for pocket money, holiday plans, birthdays etc.

6 ENSURE YOU HAVE FUN

- 6.1 This part of the Pledge covers young people's activities out of school, encouraging them to create an achievements folder for recording their successes.
- 6.2 The care planning and PEP processes can identify activities the child/young person wants to participate in, providing resources as appropriate to support the activity. Frequently the foster carer is well placed to know about local clubs and courses, but the social worker supports them in this and can signpost the family to other council services such as Children's Centres and Youth Services.

Placement Team provides information to foster carers regarding local activities available for children during school holidays in particular. Within the Placement Planning Process interests, hobbies and activities of the child being placed are discussed in order to ensure that these can be maintained and promoted.

We encourage LAC to take part in activities out of school in their local community. Funds are made available from Pupil Education Allowances if the activity meets the criteria for an award of a Pupil Education Allowance. Activities and costs are recorded on individual PEPs.

- 6.3 Looked after children are treated as full members of the carer's family, taking part in family trips and holidays. This is supported through the care planning process.
- 6.4 Not all children in care are placed in families or establishments with the same culture or religion as the child's home background. The care planning process supports children in celebrating cultural festivals appropriate to their heritage and

supervising social workers from the Placements team can assist with providing support and advice to the carer.

7 HELP AND SUPPORT YOU ON THE ROAD TO ADULTHOOD

- 7.1 This part of the Pledge covers support available to young people who are preparing to leave care, or who have recently left care.
- 7.2 All young people have a Pathway Plan to assist in their transition to adulthood which is specific to each child. It can cover a disabled child's transition to Adult Services or a care leaver's transition to managing their own financial and accommodation needs. Transition planning is started around the time of the young person's 16th birthday. This must provide a person centred approach to ensure that every young person has support to achieve their goals, aspirations and full potential. Care leavers with complex needs may transfer directly to adult services, often these transition plans involve a number of different agencies therefore the planning will need to coordinate agencies so a seamless and supported transition is achieved. The plan includes details on how the young person will be supported both financially and with advice.
- 7.3 A revised process was implemented earlier this year in order to promote increased scrutiny and accountability regarding the setting and achieving of the Pathway plan objectives. The Independent Reviewing Officer is now available to chair pathway plan review meetings for care leavers over the age of 18 years.
- 7.4 Adviza, formally known as Connexions workers attached to the Hear4u teams support young people to find the correct course for their career plans, provide accredited training if the young person finds themselves not in education or training and are actively involved in the creation of the Pathway Plans (which are monitored through review and supervision meetings).

A NEET Reduction Strategy has been drawn up with Adviza and regular reviews of the strategy take place alongside the Head Teacher's for CIC to monitor outcomes for CIC and Care Leavers making the transition to adulthood and further/higher education options. All Looked After Children in Year 9 and Year 11 are now offered an Adviza guidance interview to ensure that appropriate planning is in place to promote their education/future career options and prevent NEET.

- 7.5 Within a Pathway Plan young people will have a housing plan which is reviewed at the Young People's Housing Panel.
- 7.6 At the time of this report, all young people who were eligible for care leaver status, had been registered on the housing register. A fast track housing option is also available to young people who are able to demonstrate their capacity to maintain a tenancy. To date 2 young people have been offered a fast track tenancy. This area of cross Council working continues to be a priority.

7.7 All young people are provided with their National Insurance number before their 16th birthday; this is either done by the foster carer or the social worker, depending on a young person's circumstances.

7.8 During the Pathway Planning process which involves setting up/reviewing of the pathway plan with the young person, a "Care to Work" strategy is being developed in Wokingham. CIC and Care Leavers are invited to take part in the November 2013 'take over day'.

This is facilitated with a standalone meeting with the social worker/PA and young person discussing their needs/wishes and feelings regarding housing/education/employment and sign posting to assist them in developing independence and making a successful transition to adulthood. This information is then contained within a pathway plan document.

7.9 As part of this strategy, various activities were identified to assist young people in obtaining employment; with a particular emphasis on young people who had or were at risk of disengaging with services.

A football team was created made up of young people and staff volunteers, including those from other agencies and young men who had otherwise sought not to engage with Here4U historically were encouraged to attend.

Following positive engagement of 8 young men, who were care leavers, were then supported to make job applications following the successful interviews for trainee fitness coach roles, 8 young people were offered employment with training opportunities attached with one young person also obtaining an apprenticeship with Wokingham.

7.10 The Pathway Plan also addresses the young person's transport needs; either funding driving lessons or ensuring they are confident users of public transport, depending on their circumstances. At the time of this report, 2 young people are accessing driving lessons and 5 young people have been provided with assistance to purchase a bicycle.

7.11 Young people should have a passport before leaving care, or understand why they cannot have one.

8 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

8.1 Within the pledge, there are a number of performance indicators that are used to measure progress. These are relatively few in number; as the Pledge has a focus on qualitative measures and capturing the views of the children in care themselves.

8.2 The CPB report card is appended also.

9 QUESTIONNAIRE TO CHILDREN IN CARE

- 9.1 Monitoring the Pledge is one of Wokingham's Children in Care Council (CICC) objectives in their Terms of Reference. To do this, the CICC agreed to consult CIC via a questionnaire. Care leavers will be sent a questionnaire next year to test our delivery against the care leaver's pledge.
- 9.2 The CiCC wished their report to be the direct responses of the young people to each question and therefore these have been collated and are included at appendix C.

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 The Board is asked to:
- Note the progress made on the delivery of the Pledge for Children in Care.
 - Identify any areas which require more detailed information.

Wokingham Borough Council Fostering, Central Placements Team

Inspection report for local authority fostering agency

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Unique reference number | SC043060 |
| Inspection date | 08/01/2013 |
| Inspector | Karen Malcolm / Wilfried Maxfield |
| Type of inspection | Full |

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Setting address | Wokingham Borough Council, PO Box 154, WOKINGHAM, Berkshire, RG40 1WN |
| Telephone number | 0118 974 6750 |
| Email | |
| Registered person | Wokingham Borough Council |
| Registered manager | Hilary Jane Loades-Bannon |
| Responsible individual | Judith Ramsden |
| Date of last inspection | 12/01/2009 |

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Wokingham Borough Council's Central Placements and Fostering Service is part of Wokingham Children's Services. The service provides planned and emergency foster care placements for individual children and sibling groups of all ages, as well as parent and child placement. The service also provides kinship care assessments, solo placements for children and young people with exceptionally complex needs, short breaks and supported lodgings.

At present there are 74 approved foster carers in 43 households and 46 children and young people placed with them.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

The fostering service is effective. The outcomes for children and young people, quality of care and safeguarding is good. In relation to the leadership and management of the service, further improvement is needed. Children and young people are placed with foster and kinship carers who can meet their needs. Good quality support is provided to carers that results in placement stability and minimal unplanned endings. Children and young people are able to make good progress in relation to their starting points across all aspects of their care and effective arrangements are in place to support this. Children and young people have positive views about their care and their relationships with foster carers.

Foster carers receive supervision and support. They were able to demonstrate a good understanding of children and young people's needs. Children and young people are actively engaged in plans that are made for them. They have been able to influence the service through the children in care council and other groups.

The fostering team is appropriately experienced and qualified. Foster carers maintain good working relationships with the service and support is provided to the whole fostering family.

The leaders and managers are committed to fostering and have moved the service forward. They have an insightful understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. Managers have put in measures to improve it. Areas of shortfalls identified during this inspection relate to ensuring that carers receive their payment.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that payments of allowances and any fees are made promptly at the agreed time and that foster carers are provided with a statement of payment at the end of each tax year (NMS 28.2)
- maintain clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. This includes the financial viability of the service, any serious incidents, allegations or complaints about the service and ensuring the quality of the service. (NMS 25.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **good**.

Children and young people are provided with good personalised care and carefully selected placements. Therefore, they benefit from placements that match and meet their various needs. This ensures that whenever possible, foster care placements constitute the best available option for individual children and young people. Children and young people confirm that they are involved in placement decisions and are given sufficient information about their foster carers at the beginning of a placement.

Children and young people make good progress and receive good support in stable and nurturing foster placements. Unplanned endings to placements are the exception. Young people report that they are happy with the care and support they receive. One young person said, 'coming into foster care was the first time I felt safe and content'.

Children and young people are positive about any preparation for independence. Young people praise the participation office for promoting and supporting their views and wishes throughout a placement and advocating effectively on their behalf. There are good systems in place that enable children and young people to be actively involved in decisions about their day-to-day care. The local authority has assisted young people to develop a young people in care council. Current members say that they feel very encouraged to contribute significantly to the running and development of the service. The local authority has developed a particularly effective structure to enable young people to be heard at the highest level of decision making. However,

this excellent level of participation does not currently extend to young people under the age of 16.

Educational outcomes for young people are good and achievement is promoted at all levels. Foster carers praise the current headteacher for looked after children for providing them with the support they need to actively and effectively promote children's learning and achievements. Young people's educational needs are identified and promoted by good planning. Personal education planning is a particular strength of the local authority. Attendance, achievements and outcomes for young people are continuously monitored and data shows that children in foster care are making good progress.

Young people's health and emotional wellbeing is well supported. They benefit from the local authority's strong focus on health issues and health promotion. Strong working relationships are maintained with a wide range of health services and a very effective looked after children's nurse service. The nurses coordinate a good range of proactive campaigns that focus on smoking cessation, drug and alcohol use, sexual health and healthy lifestyle programmes. All of this input is designed to enable young people to understand the importance of good health and take responsibility for staying healthy.

Young people are strongly supported to become independent and take advantage of the good vocational and educational opportunities they are being provided with. The service promotes a range of effective measures to provide young people with good support and care beyond the age of 18 and into early adulthood. Carers have a strong focus on planning for independence through good training and effective independence plans.

Quality of service

The quality of the service is **good**.

All those involved with the fostering service are generally satisfied and positive about the service they receive. For example, they stated that the current senior management team is strong and communication has improved. There is now stability within the teams, along with positive partnership working with other professionals.

The fostering service recognises that the skills match has been a challenge for those children and young people who have specific needs. Updating the training programme with on-line access, along with the progression and retention policy, has given carers the opportunity to gain specialist skills. Therefore, foster carers are able to meet some of the current demands. Where the child's needs are complex and specialist care is required, a match may be met through one of the preferred providers. These placements are effectively vetted, monitored and reviewed regularly to ensure that good care practices and stability are maintained.

The fostering service has made good effort to recruit more foster carers through various marketing campaigns locally. The preparation and assessment of prospective

carers are good. Supporting and retaining existing carers has been an equal priority within the fostering service. In addition to providing a valuable fostering resource, foster carers are a key resource in the recruitment of new carers. Existing carers are encouraged to participate in recruitment events. There is an informal arrangement for new carers to have a 'buddy' for additional support and advice when needed. The fostering service recognises that this arrangement is working well. One of the strategic plans of action reported to the corporate parenting board is to formalise this system for all new carers.

Children and young people benefit from an effectively operated and quorate fostering panel that is independently chaired. The fostering panel comprises stable members with good expertise, skills and knowledge. The panel chair is fairly new and has already made an impact to the function of the panel. Training days have been set aside to enhance their knowledge and working together ethic. The agency decision-maker is well informed to make decisions based on good quality information.

Foster carers are part of the team working with children and young people. Foster carers stated that with the change of management, the support for them and their family has improved. They all agreed that the change has been spearheaded by the service manager, who has supported and enabled them to understand their roles better. A part of the service manager's agenda is to visit each carer individually to obtain an overview of where the improvements can be made. Carers stated that they welcomed these visits. They also made comments that the fostering service recognises and supports their whole family, which they find encouraging.

The fostering service ensures that children and young people are placed with carers who can meet their needs. This includes children and young people from different cultural and religious backgrounds whose needs are met with additional support. Support can be from providing specialist bedding, to advocacy support from the Children's Rights Officer. Placement stability is high on the service's agenda and when a placement ends, clear and robust processes are put in place to ensure that the move is sensitively managed.

Foster carers say they feel part of the team working with children and young people and share responsibility with other key professionals in the child's life. They say that they feel valued and have good working relationships with their link social workers. One carer said 'I have an good link worker who is always on the end of the phone if I need them.'

Foster carers confirm that they receive good support from the fostering service. They receive unannounced visits once a year. Foster carers have the opportunity to undertake a wide range of training relating to childcare issues, some of which are tailored to meet the needs of the specific children and young people for whom they provide care. Link social workers are also encouraged to participate in the same training, giving them an insight into how carers support children in their care. Carers say that they can access training through 'my e-learning' if they cannot physically attend training courses. Records of all training undertaken are maintained on-line. A

carer said 'the training has expanded my knowledge and experiences and it is a marked improvement from what we were offered in the previous years. Being a level three carer, I know what I need to achieve to maintain my status.'

22 carers have achieved approved childcare qualifications. The remaining carers are on target to complete this training, which enhances their practice.

Safeguarding children and young people

The service is **good** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

The fostering service effectively protects children and young people from harm. This is delivered through a variety of means, such as the support and monitoring of carers and positive partnership work with health, education and other services that have safeguarding responsibilities. Children and young people say that they feel safe with their foster families. Foster carers are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities. Foster carers understand the potential impact of abuse on children and young people, they are fully aware of the procedures to protect them and the training they attend enhances this. They are visited unannounced by fostering social workers, which enables the service to protect and support carers and children more effectively.

Children and young people benefit from practices that promote their safety and welfare. Allegations, disclosures, complaints and concerns are effectively and robustly handled and monitored. Action is taken that is in the best interests of children and young people when they have made disclosures about their treatment in foster care or concerns have come to light through other means. Foster carers are aware about the allegations process. They have access to independent support and advice should they be the subject of a complaint or allegation.

The stable placements experienced by children and young people minimise the occasions that they go missing from home. There were 14 incidents where children and young people had gone missing in 2011-2012, relating to four individuals. Appropriate reporting procedures are followed in the event that children and young people are missing from home. Children and young people have good access to independent advice and support and know how to complain. The young people's children in care council group have a good access to the children's rights and advocacy service. Therefore, any concern or support needed is immediately addressed and supported. The main support the advocacy service undertakes is additional support for young people at their looked-after children's annual reviews.

The recruitment and vetting of adults working for the fostering service, foster carers, and those aged 18 or over who reside in foster homes, safeguards children and young people. Young people's involvement in the recruitment of staff influences decisions made about an individual's suitability. This has been successful.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the local authority fostering agency are **adequate**.

The fostering service is managed well. The senior management team clearly understand many of the strengths and weaknesses of the fostering service. The fostering service benefits from a fairly new but effective senior management team who have a broad knowledge of the foster carers and the children and young people within the service. The team manager and fostering staff are appropriately qualified and experienced and understand their roles and responsibilities. Fostering social workers are skilled. Staff are valued, supported, supervised and have robust training opportunities. This ensures that their professional development is promoted and they continue to provide an effective service to fostering households.

There were three requirements and three recommendations from the last inspection and these have been complied with. These related to recruitment checks, the management structure, monitoring of placements made with preferred providers, matching and health and safety assessment regarding animals. With regards to training, specific training was needed for carers that were preparing young people for independent living.

The fostering service's Statement of Purpose is well written and provides information about being looked after, together with the children's guide. The children's guide presents information to children and young people about fostering, what services they can expect and how they can complain.

Surveys received by Ofsted in May 2012 were mixed. A total of 17 responses were received from foster carers and panel members. Feedback from panel members was generally positive. The main concerns raised by carers related to a lack of consistent support in areas of contact, training and the effect that the high turnaround of children's social workers was having on fostered children. The senior management team are aware of the concerns and have implemented several strategies to address these areas. The fostering service's action plan strategy is to review the carers' forums and the 'buddy system', provide training opportunities for carers and staff, revisit the recruitment and retention strategies and improve outcomes for children and young people. Although improvements are being strategically monitored and reviewed with regards to concerns raised by carers, there is no record of the numbers of complaints or concerns received. The local authority has clear and robust procedures for handling any concerns or complaints. However, this system has not been fully utilised by the fostering service to ensure the best or appropriate outcome is made. Therefore, it is unclear whether any learning derived from the concerns or complaints received have been captured by the service and to further improve children and young people.

Foster carers are clear about the fostering service's payment structures and the payments due to them. However, within the last six months, payments of allowances and any fees owed to carers have not been made promptly at the agreed time. The senior management team is aware of the technical error and are addressing this.

Kinship foster carers receive the support they require to meet the needs of children placed with them. They have a good voice amongst other carers and are supported appropriately according to their needs and the needs of the children placed with them. Some kinship carers have been instrumental in revisiting the kinship information leaflet for the service to enable, guide and support carers positively through the process of supporting their family in need.

Corporate parenting is taken seriously, by ensuring that children and young people's views are listened to throughout the council. Most carers who were spoken to reported there has been a shift within the fostering service with regards to support, improvements and challenges. The views of children and young people are listened to, valued and are influencing developments within the local authority. The fostering service is represented on the corporate parenting panel along with two representatives from the children in care council, senior managers and elected members. Young people spoken to said that 'their voices are heard throughout the council which they deemed as empowering'. Children and young people's achievements are also recognised by the Council and once a year; this is celebrated in an awards ceremony.

Children and foster carers receive a service from the senior management team, staff and panel members who have the competence to meet their needs. There is a holistic approach to working positively and together for the welfare and safety of the child.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for local authority fostering agencies.

Wokingham's Pledge

What is Wokingham's Pledge?

The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 means that Wokingham and other local authorities have to write down a list of promises to their children in care to make sure they are good corporate parents. This list is called Wokingham's Pledge and was written by the Children in Care Council in consultation with other children in care and care leavers.

What does Wokingham's Pledge promise to do?

We will only promise you things we know we can do
We will be honest with you at all times
We promise to keep you safe

We Promise to:

Give you a home where you belong and

- Try and provide a placement of your choice
- Give you information about any home you are moving to
- Introduce you to carers beforehand, unless it is an emergency move and have introductory visits
- Fully involve you in plans made for your future promoting your involvement in planning meetings and reviews providing with you with all minutes and reports from meetings you attend
- Help you understand your past and why you are in care including doing life story work with you
- Help you keep in contact with your family and friends providing a contact schedule that you will be given and if any contact with someone is not possible then give you a clear reason why
- Help you build a photo album of important people in your life and places you have been while in Care and provide you with a 'treasure box' to keep all your special papers and possessions in.
- Care and plan for you as an individual person involving you in decisions taking account of your particular needs, especially those relating to your age, interests, disability, race, culture, religion and sexuality.

- To ensure you have an up to date Care Plan
- To ensure that when your social worker stops working with you they say a proper goodbye and whenever possible introduce you to your new social worker

Make sure you get an excellent Education and

- Make sure that you have a place at a school that will help you to do your best
- To ensure you remain at the same school but if this is not possible to involve you in the choice of your new school
- Take an active interest in what you do at school (e.g. attend parents' evenings)
- Support you in your education plan and in subject/career options
- Encourage and if necessary help you to do your homework
- Celebrate your achievements
- Provide you with a range of learning opportunities
- Ensure every child in care or young person has access to a computer and safe access to the internet
- Provide computers for post year-11s in full time education including those in further and/or higher education
- Ensure you reach your academic and / or vocational potential??
- Ensure you have copies of school reports

Help you have a Healthy lifestyle and

- Provide you with contact details for a named nurse specifically involved with Children in Care
- Make sure you are registered at a Doctor's
- Provide you with access to information on all health issues
- Make sure you have regular dental and health check-ups
- Point you towards specialist groups and drop-ins
- Accompany you to appointments if you wish
- Do everything possible to make sure you've got the skills and knowledge to keep yourself healthy and happy now and in the future

To ensure you have fun and

- Encourage you to take part in at least one leisure activity of your choice
- Provide information on local activities and events

- Support you to access sport and leisure facilities
- Help you record your achievements by providing an 'Achievement folder' for every child in care
- Take an active interest in your hobbies and celebrate your achievements
- Involve you in activities/holidays with your carers
- To give you the opportunity to go on a school holiday
- Celebrate dates that are important to you including birthdays and religious festivals.

Listen to and value your opinions and

- If you have a disability make sure that you have your own 'communication passport'.
- Involve you in decisions and plans made about you and make sure you understand them
- Make sure you are involved in your reviews
- Offer you the opportunity to talk to your Independent Reviewing Officer before your review and give you their contact details
- Offer you the opportunity to be involved in participation and consultation groups such as the Children in Care Council
- Make sure you know who is responsible for you (including your corporate parents) and how to contact them
- Give you a timely response to any enquiry or request
- Make sure you have the opportunity to talk to your social worker alone every time he/she visits you and know how to contact them
- We will make sure you know your rights and what services you're entitled to
- You will have clear information and support about how to access all the help you need, including advocates, making complaints and contacting directors of children's services
- We will be honest with you

Help and support you on the road to adulthood and

- Give you good preparation and planning for when you leave care, by providing information and advice, including drop-ins and groups
- Ensure you have your national Insurance number by your sixteenth birthday

- Find you work experience placements
- Help you find and settle into a new home emotionally, financially, securely and safely
- Help you access adult services if you need them
- Ensure you have access to an NHS dentist
- Make sure you can afford bills and rent if you are in low paid employment and support in financial difficulties
- Help you learn to drive and be confident in using public transport
- Help you make the most of your chances for training, further education and employment including identifying funding
- We will make sure you have an up to date passport or understand the reasons why you don't
- If you get in trouble with the police we will make sure that the right adult is there to offer you help
- Ensure you have a detailed Pathway plan
- Ensure you have a Personal Advisor from your 16th birthday

Who makes sure we keep our promises?

We don't always get it right so if you think Wokingham is breaking its promises, you can make your views known through:

- The Children in Care Council
- Regular reviews
- Your Social Worker
- The Children's Rights Officer
- A complaints procedure
- Your social worker or carer can put you in contact with any of them or help you with your complaint directly

If you're a bit nervous about saying it yourself, you can ask for someone else to help or even to do it for you – these are known as “advocates”.

In addition, the CICC will be monitoring and reviewing the Pledge and they will let us know if they think we are not keeping our side of the bargain. Once a

year, they will be suggesting changes to the Pledge if they think it's necessary.

WOKINGHAM'S PLEDGE FOR CARE LEAVERS

The Charter for Care Leavers is designed to raise expectation, aspiration and understanding of what care leavers need and what the government and local authorities should do to be good Corporate Parents. Wokingham's Pledge for Care Leavers has used this Charter for the basis of their pledge

We Promise:

To respect and honour your identity

- We will support you to discover and to be who you are and honour your unique identity. We will help you develop your own personal beliefs and values and accept your culture and heritage. We will celebrate your identity as an individual, as a member of identity groups and as a valued member of your community. We will value and support important relationships, and help you manage changing relationships or come to terms with loss, trauma or other significant life events. We will support you to express your identity positively to others.

To believe in you

- We will value your strengths, gifts and talents and encourage your aspirations. We will hold a belief in your potential and a vision for your future even if you have lost sight of these yourself. We will help you push aside limiting barriers and encourage and support you to pursue your goals in whatever ways we can. We will believe in you, celebrate you and affirm you.

To listen to you

- We will take time to listen to you, respect, and strive to understand your point of view. We will place your needs, thoughts and feelings at the heart of all decisions about you, negotiate with you, and show how we have taken these into account. If we don't agree with you we will fully explain why. We will provide easy access to complaint and appeals processes and promote and encourage access to independent advocacy whenever you need it.

To inform you

- We will give you information that you need at every point in your journey, from care to adulthood, presented in a way that you want including information on legal entitlements and the service you can expect to receive from us at different stages in the journey. We will keep information up to date and accurate. We will ensure you know where to get current information once you are no longer in regular touch with leaving care services. We will make clear to you what information about yourself and your time in care you are entitled to see. We will support you to access this when you want it, to manage any feelings that you might have about the information, and to put on record any disagreement with factual content

To support you

- As well as information, advice, practical and financial help we will provide emotional support. We will make sure you do not have to fight for support you are entitled to* and we will fight for you if other agencies let you down. We will support you if you change your mind about what you want to do. We will continue to care about you even when we are no longer caring for you. We will make it our responsibility to understand your needs. If we can't meet those needs we will try and help you find a service that can. We will help you learn from your mistakes; we will not judge you and we will be here for you no matter how many times you come back for support. We will provide any support set out in current Regulations and Guidance and will not unreasonably withhold advice when you are no longer legally entitled to this service.

To find you a home

- We will work alongside you to prepare you for your move into independent living only when you are ready. We will help you think about the choices available and to find accommodation that is right for you. We will do everything we can to ensure you are happy and feel safe when you move to independent living. We recognise that at different times you may need to take a step back and start over again. We will do our best to support you until you are settled in your independent life; we will not judge you for your mistakes or refuse to advise you because you did not listen to us before. We will work proactively with other agencies to help you sustain your home.

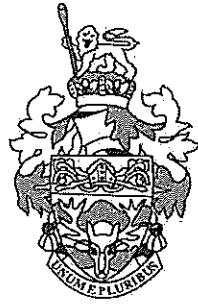
To be a lifelong champion

- We will do our best to help you break down barriers encountered when dealing with other agencies. We will work together with the services you need, including housing, benefits, colleges and universities, employment providers and health services to help you establish yourself as an independent individual. We will treat you with courtesy and humanity whatever your age when you return to us for advice or support. We will help you to be the driver of your life and not the passenger. We will point you in a positive direction and journey alongside you at your pace. We will trust and respect you. We will not forget about you.

* Details of care leavers entitlements are listed in the booklets:

A guide to financial and practical support for care leavers *and*

Guidance for care leavers on the grant for setting up home



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Children's Services' Foster Carers' Charter

April 2012

Wokingham Borough Council Children's Services' Foster Carers' Charter

Introduction

Children come first

- Every child in foster care deserves to experience as full a family life as possible, as part of a loving foster family with Carers who can make everyday decisions in respect of his/her care as they would for their own child and without the child feeling that he or she 'stands out' as a Child in Care.
- Children should be given every support to develop their own identities and aspirations, to fulfil their individual potential, and to take advantage of all available opportunities to promote their talents and skills. Above all, they should be listened to and respected.

Wokingham Borough Council's Children's Services must:

- Recognise in practice the importance of the child's relationship with his or her foster family as one that can make a significant difference in the child's life and which may endure into adulthood.
- Listen to and involve foster children and their Carers in decision-making and planning, and provide both foster children and Foster Carers with full information about each other.
- In making placements:
 - be clear about the care or support that will be provided (including for the child into adulthood)
 - recognise that the support needs of both the child and the Foster Carer may change over time and keep this under review
 - be sensitive to the needs of both the child and the Foster Carer at the time of making and ending placements and have contingency plans in place should any placement not be successful.
- Treat each Foster Carer with openness, fairness and respect, as a core member of the team around the child, and support her/him in making reasonable and appropriate decisions on behalf of her/his foster child.
- Ensure that each Foster Carer has the support services and development opportunities that she/he needs in order to provide her/his foster child with the best possible care. This includes liaising with local Foster Carers' groups and seeking to address any difficulties and disseminate best practice.

- Make sure that Foster Carers are recompensed for their time and are given clear information about:
 - the financial package (fees and allowances) that they will receive
 - any other support that they can expect to receive
 - the training opportunities available to them
 - any holidays to which they may be entitled
 - any respite arrangements that may be available to them
 - how any of the above may be affected if the Carer is the subject of an allegation or complaint.
 - WBC Children’s Services policies and procedures (that are applicable to the role of a Foster Carer).

Foster Carers must:

- Provide positive adult role models for any child/ren placed in their care.
- Treat their foster child as they would their own child, and be a “pushy parent” in advocating for support and services for the child in respect of all aspects of the child’s wellbeing, including health, development and education.
- Co-operate fully as part of a team with other key professionals involved in the child’s life.
- Support their foster child to enable him or her to achieve to the best of his/her potential.
- At all times promote the best interests of their foster child and do all that they can to ensure that each placement is successful.
- Take up appropriate learning and development opportunities in order to continue to develop within their role.
- Seek to develop skills and approaches that enable them to make a positive impact.
- Support their foster child to help him or her to counter any possible bullying and/or discrimination that he/she experiences as a result of his/her care status or birth family background.
- At all times be mindful of the need to protect foster children from harm.

Roles and commitment

Children's Services' role

WBC Children's Services aims to provide stable and first class foster care for children in care aimed at supporting and encouraging them to grow and develop as individuals. To achieve this aim, we recruit, train and approve a range of Foster Carers and deliver ongoing support to them. We seek to ensure that the training and support provided both pre and post approval is of a high standard and directly relevant to the fostering task.

Foster Carer's role

Foster Carers are at the heart of Wokingham Borough Council's foster care service. They look after children and young people in a family environment, providing them with good quality care, stability, and opportunities and support aimed at enabling them to grow and develop and to reach their potential.

Our working relationships are based on mutual trust and respect. This charter explains what we can expect from each other.

WBC's Children's Services' commitment

Foster Carers can expect from us:

- Working in partnership
- Information
- Clarity about decisions
- Support
- Learning and development opportunities
- Fair treatment
- Clear communication and consultation.

Foster Carers' commitment

The Fostering Service can expect from us:

- Working in partnership
- Respect for the child
- Information sharing

- A commitment to learning and professional development
- A commitment to good communication and consultation.

What WBC approved Foster Carers can expect from WBC's Children's Services

1. Working in partnership

The authority will recognise the individual skills and experience that individual Foster Carers have and the significant difference that they make to the everyday lives of Children in Care.

We will:

- Value your knowledge, skills and experience equally to that of other professionals and recognise that you are the people who live with different children and young people and know them best.
- Include you in all meetings that affect you and the child/young person who you care for, consulting you about your availability when setting up meetings and providing you with adequate notice of when meetings are arranged.
- Ensure that a member of the Fostering Team is available to attend meetings with you where this is appropriate.
- Ensure that our fostering service meets the standards set out in Fostering Regulations and Guidance (including the National Minimum Standards).
- Treat you without discrimination and respect you as colleagues.
- Respect confidentiality.

2. Information

We know that information is vital in order for Foster Carers to provide care that meets the needs of the children and young people who they care for.

We will:

- Make every effort to provide you with all the information that you need in order to care safely for the children/young people placed with you and provide this information in writing prior to placement (except when a placement is made in an emergency and it is not feasible to do so, when we will provide this information as soon as possible after the placement is made).
- Ensure that in advance of each placement a Placement Plan is drawn up in discussion with you and agreed with you (except when a placement is made in an emergency, when this will be done as soon as possible after the placement is made).

- Ensure that Placement Plans are reviewed regularly via the Child in Carer Review process.
- Provide you with LAC Review consultation paperwork at least 5 working days in advance of a child's Child in Care Review meeting and circulate the review minutes within 20 working days of the review taking place.
- Ensure that you are involved in the ongoing planning for any children/young people placed in your care and that you are informed promptly if there is any significant change in a child/young person's situation or Care Plan.
- Provide you with information on all financial matters including, fees and allowances, additional entitlements and tax.
- Provide you with full details of all departmental policies and procedures relevant to the role of a Foster Carer.

3. Clarity about decisions

We recognise that in order for foster children to live a full family life Foster Carers must be able to make decisions regarding the day-to-day lives of the children who they foster.

We will:

- Ensure that, wherever possible, you are able to make everyday decisions that mean that any children/young people placed with you are not treated differently to their peers and can feel part of your family.
- Provide clarity about what decisions you can and cannot make at the outset of any placement so that everyone understands who is responsible for what and the process for obtaining specific permissions if required.

4. Support

We recognise that fostering can be an isolating and challenging task and that appropriate and timely support can make all the difference to the success of a placement and the wellbeing of both the foster child and the foster family.

We will:

- Provide you with monthly supervision and weekly phone contact.
- Be proactive in discussing any difficulties that arise and pro-active in seeking to resolve any difficulties or disagreements with a minimum of delay.

- Provide you with access to 24-hour support from people with fostering expertise.
- Respond positively to any reasonable request for additional support (whilst always being mindful of the best interests of the child/young person concerned).
- Pay Carers' fees, allowances and expenses in a timely manner.
- Ensure that there is a local support group, recognised by the Fostering Service, through which Carers and their families can find support and share experiences with other foster families.

5. Learning and development opportunities

We believe that Foster Carers should be enabled to access learning and development opportunities throughout their fostering careers. This will promote them developing the knowledge and skills that they need, and enable them to develop their practice in order that they can help to transform the lives of the children/young people who they foster.

We will:

- Provide Carers and their families with appropriate and relevant training delivered by trainers who understand the fostering task.
- Keep the Training Programme that we offer to Carers under regular review.
- Provide Carers with other development opportunities aimed at furthering their professional development in their fostering role – this may include taking a mentoring role, providing support to less experienced Carers.

6. Fair treatment

We recognise that Foster Carers have a right to be treated fairly, no matter what the circumstances.

We will:

- Consult with our WBC approved Foster Carers before changing any terms or conditions that directly affect them.
- Ensure openness in all of our discussions and communications with our approved Carers.
- Ensure that should any WBC approved Carer be the subject of an allegation or complaint:

- She/he is treated with respect and provided with emotional support
- we adhere to our agreed timescales and keep her/him informed about the state of our enquiries
- she/he knows the arrangements for the payment of fees and allowances in the event that she/he is not able to foster while the subject of an allegation.

7. Communication and consultation

We believe that open and honest but sensitive dialogue is the key to a good relationship between Foster Carers and the Local Authority.

We will:

- Facilitate regular communication between our WBC approved Foster Carers and:
 - the Family Placement Management Team
 - The Head of Children's Services.
 - Relevant Councillors
- Ensure that we consult with our approved Carers in a meaningful way on matters that are likely to affect them as Carers.
- Provide timely feedback from consultations.

What the Fostering Service can expect from Foster Carers

1. Working in partnership

We will consistently provide a high standard of care and demonstrate positive conduct.

We will:

- Use our knowledge and experience to the best of our abilities and make use of our skills in order to provide all foster children/young people with a positive experience of family life.
- Given reasonable notice attend all meetings about the children/young people who we care for (unless there is an exceptional reason that prevents us doing so).
- Work positively and co-operatively with Wokingham Children's Services and with any other agencies and/or professionals involved with a foster child, such as school, health and religious establishments, and treat professional colleagues with respect.
- Demonstrate a willingness to work with each child/young person's birth parents, wider family members and other people who are significant to the child and facilitate contact arrangements that are deemed by the Local Authority to be in the best interests of the child/young person.
- Meet the standards set out in Fostering Regulations and Guidance (including the National Minimum Standards) and to at all times endeavour to follow departmental policies and procedures.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Be proactive in discussing any difficulties that arise in our working relationship with the Local Authority or any particular Officer and proactive in seeking to resolve any difficulties or disagreements with a minimum of delay.

2. Respect for the child

Every child and young person should be respected as an individual and supported to have their needs met and to achieve their aspirations and potential.

We will:

- Respect and promote the religious, linguistic and cultural heritage of all foster children and young people.
- Afford the same level of care and protection to a foster child/young person as we would our own child in accordance with the National Minimum Standards
- Ensure that each child/young person has the right to make decisions regarding his/her own life, as appropriate to his/her age and understanding.
- At all times promote the best interests of each child/young person.

3. Information

We recognise that building and maintaining a high standard fostering service necessitates an open exchange of information between Foster Carers and the Local Authority

We will:

- Ensure that we are familiar with all of Wokingham Borough Council's policies and procedures that are relevant to fostering and know the expectations that they place on Foster Carers.
- Inform our Supervising Social Worker promptly about any significant changes in our household.
- Make our Supervising Social Worker aware when we are missing any relevant information about any child or young person placed so that this can be rectified as quickly as possible.
- Inform our Supervising Social Worker at an early stage about any difficulties that arise for us in respect of a placement so that appropriate supports can be put in place to reduce the risk of a disruption.
- Ensure that when sharing information with a child/young person about his/her Care Plan, changes in contact arrangements, etc. we are mindful of the child/young person's level of understanding and particular needs and consistently support the line taken by the Local Authority so as to avoid confusion for the child/young person.

4. Learning, development and support

We must be enabled to access learning and development opportunities throughout our fostering careers. This will enable us to develop and maintain the skills and knowledge that we need, and support us to

develop our practice in order that we can help to transform the lives of the children and young people who we foster.

We will:

- Be prepared to continue to develop our knowledge and skills throughout our fostering career.
- Attend appropriate and relevant training.
- Take up development opportunities that are offered to us which are likely to further our professional development as Carers.
- Let the Training and Development Team know in advance if we are unable to attend trainings on which we are booked.
- Proactively seek to develop positive links with other Carers.
- Work co-operatively with our Supervising Social Worker in order to identify and address our training and support needs.

5. Communication and consultation

We recognise that open and honest but sensitive dialogue is the key to a positive relationship between Foster Carers and the Local Authority.

We will:

- Respond to local consultations and discussion in order to inform the development of the service.
- Take up opportunities to meet with:
 - the Family Placement Management Team
 - The Head of Children's Services.
 - Relevant Councillorsin order to promote dialogue and a good working relationship.

This Charter was drawn up between Wokingham Borough Council Children's Services' Approved Foster Carers and Wokingham Borough Council's Family Placement Management Team in April 2012 and will be reviewed between both parties in April 2013.