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**Report of the Director of Children's Services****EXECUTIVE BOARD**

11 February 2011

**Outcomes for Looked After Children in the care of Leeds**

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**Electoral Wards Affected:**

Ward Members consulted  
(referred to in report)

**Specific Implications For:**

Equality & Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call-in

Not Eligible for Call-in

(Details contained in the Report)

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.0 This is the second annual report on the outcomes of looked after children and care leavers. It provides a summary of the work done in response to the improvement plan defined following the inspection of Looked After Children's Services Report which was published in Jan 2010.
- 2.0 Against this background, this report summarises the progress, against the Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes, of Looked after Children in Leeds and identifies strategies for improving those outcomes. Improving the outcomes of Looked After Children and Care Leaves (LAC) has been highlighted as a key issue in recent evaluations and Local Authority inspections. It has consistently been identified as a priority in key children's services inspections and is a priority of Ofsted's inspection framework. Leeds has reflected through its prioritisation in the current Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) and its focus on looked after children as part of the new Plan, currently being developed, with reducing the number of looked after

children seen as one of our three 'turning the curve' priorities.

- 3.0 There are many Looked After Children in Leeds who make good progress against a variety of outcomes, and some of these achieve exceptionally well. However, overall progress is below that of their peers, although broadly in line with available national comparative data. There have been significant changes in the way in which partners across Children Leeds collaborate to address the needs of looked after children and care leavers and this has been championed by the elected member Corporate Carer group. This report demonstrates improvements in outcomes and performance within every outcome domain, and a much improved inspection profile against regulated provision, i.e. residential, fostering and adoption services. The report also highlights the very significant financial challenges within this service, which relate to placements costs, and the actions being undertaken to address these.
- 4.0 There is evidence that the strategic and operational changes made in Leeds have helped to make improvements to outcomes for looked after children. There is also evidence of a continued narrowing of the gap between looked after children and their peers and between looked after children's potential and actual achievement. However, this is matched by recognition of the need to continue with significant focus on improving outcomes for looked after children. The current transformation work in children's services reflects this.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Board:

Recognise that improving outcomes for looked after children in Leeds remains one of the highest priorities for children's services and the city and consider this report in light of this.

Acknowledge the key role that elected members, as corporate parents, play in supporting work with looked after children, both through formal arrangements such as Fostering and Adoption Panels and at a local level through links with, for example, schools, children's homes and foster carers, and continue to support and encourage this work.

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT**

- 1.1 This report summarises the progress of Looked after Children in Leeds and identifies strategies that have supported improvement in those outcomes. It uses the widely recognised Every Child Matters outcome areas as a framework for this. It also summarises progress for regulated Fostering, Adoption and Residential services.

## **2.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 At its meeting in Dec 2009, Executive Board received its first comprehensive overview of outcomes for looked after children.
- 2.2 Improving the outcomes of Looked After Children and Care Leaves (LAC) has been highlighted as a key issue in evaluations and Local Authority inspections.
- 2.3 Since 2007 there has been a concerted effort to integrate and coordinate work with and for looked after children across the local authority and its partners. These changes have raised the profile of looked after children across the city; built closer working relationships between partners; raised expectations for the outcomes of the children and young people; and developed a more strategic approach to improving outcomes.

## **3.0 STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK TO SUPPORT LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

- 3.1 In addition to the frontline staff working across children's services who support looked after children every day, a number of senior posts and arrangements give leadership support and representation to this work. Since 2007 Leeds has had a seconded headteacher leading the Virtual School for Looked After Children; this secondment continues to the end of the 2010-2011 academic year. In the summer of 2010 Children's Services also appointed a new Head of Service for looked after children. Taken together these roles are helping to champion the welfare and progress of looked after children and move towards a more integrated service delivery model.
- 3.2 As reported previously to Executive Board, there is a clear intention as part of the current transformation programme to further strengthen integrated support to looked after children, through designated looked after children's arrangements for different parts of the city. This is being complemented by both a review of the Multi-Agency looked After Partnership, the senior officer group tasked with taking an overview of work for looked after children across the city, and by work to strengthen the current corporate carer group arrangements, discussed further below:
- 3.3 Chaired by the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services, the Elected Member Corporate Carer Group acts to support and challenge services working with looked after children and care leavers. The profile of looked after children is raised through the collective and individual advocacy of Members who also attend Area Committees.

Over the last 12 months the Elected Member Corporate Carer Group has:

- increased the scope of its monitoring beyond those looked after children in residential care to those in other care settings, particularly in foster care;
- supported the changes that enabled the Fostering Service to continue its transformation into a service judged good across all aspects of inspection;
- supported the range of educational support now offered to looked after children,

- and scrutinised their impact;
- challenged in those areas where looked after children continue to have outcomes below those of their peers; and,
- developed increasingly close working relationships with the Children in Care Council ('Have a Voice'). This has enabled them to hear direct from young people about the issues that concern them.

## **4.0 MAIN ISSUES**

### **4.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN COHORT**

- 4.1.1 The number of children and young people in the care of Leeds has risen from 1370 in November 2009 to 1434 in November 2010; the number peaking at 1445 in June 2010. At any time over the last year between 260 and 280 of this total have come from BME groups. Statistical comparisons are calculated in the rate of Looked After Children per 10,000 children in the general population. At 93 per 10,000, Leeds has one of the highest rates among comparator authorities. As at 17 January there were 1434 looked after children, 47 of whom are unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- 4.1.2 Of the total population approximately 24% (344) are aged 0-4 years; 25% (359) are aged 5-10 years; 32% (459) are aged 11-15 years; and 19% (272) are aged 16-17 years.
- 4.1.3 The reasons children and young people become looked after are overwhelmingly related to 'abuse or neglect' (82%) while 9% result from aspects of family dysfunction/parenting issues. Of the remaining looked after children approximately 4% (up to 60 children) are unaccompanied asylum seekers and the rest comprise small numbers of disabled children (less than 20) or children of disabled parents (approximately 20) or children exhibiting socially unacceptable behaviour (less than 20).
- 4.1.4 13% of primary and 18% of secondary aged children and young people are placed outside Leeds which is an increase compared to 2009; but the large majority continue to live in, and go to school in, Leeds.
- 4.1.5 46% of school age looked after children who go to school in Leeds are in primary schools, 47% in secondary schools, and 5% in Specialist Inclusive Learning Centres. The remaining 2% is made up of children on mainstream school or SILC rolls who are, at any one time, temporarily educated in either Pupil Referral Units or in secure establishments (Secure Children's Centres, Young Offenders Institutions or Secure Training Establishments).
- 4.1.6 The proportion of looked after children in a special needs category has fallen by 4% since 2009 to approximately 66% but this is still very much greater than the proportion among Leeds pupils as a whole (19%). The proportion of looked after children with a statement of SEN or registered as School Action Plus has fallen by a similar amount to 46%. The main need remains behaviour, emotional and social difficulties (BESD), with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) also being significant.
- 4.1.7 53% of looked after children are in foster placements; 22% with Family Network Carers; 13% Placed with Parents; 10% are in Residential Placements and the remainder comprise those children who are either in placements awaiting the completion of the adoption process or in a secure placement at any one point in time.

4.1.8 In addition there are approximately 400 older care leavers aged 18-20, and nearly 50 aged 21-25.

## **5.0 EVERY CHILD MATTERS OUTCOMES**

### **5.1 Being Healthy**

5.1.1 Both the announced inspection of services to looked after children (OfSTED, January 2010) and the recent inspection of the Fostering Service (OfSTED, June 2010) judged provision to help looked after children and young people be healthy, including support for sexual health, as good. In the Adoption Services inspection (Ofsted), this element is not judged.

5.1.3 The proportion of looked after children and care leavers with up to date immunisations is reported annually and has increased from 57% in 2007-2008 to 76% in 2008-2009 and 84% in 2009-2010.

5.1.6 Pregnant looked after teenagers and teenage parents are supported by the sexual health nurse for looked after children which improves health and education outcomes for young mothers, fathers and their children. The target 12 week booking period for pregnant teenagers is achieved for LAC and their access to ante-natal support is good as a result. Other outcomes, such as breast feeding, are increasing.

5.1.7 Those looked after children who have been identified as having a substance misuse problem has declined significantly from 5.2% in 2007 to 2% in the most recent return. All of these young people who required it were offered, and accepted, an intervention to address their misuse.

### **5.2 Being Healthy: Focus for Development**

5.2.1 NHS investment in the Looked After Children's Health Team has been maintained and the proportion of looked after children with an up-to-date health needs assessment (HNA) has continued to rise to 91% in 2009-2010. The cumulative figure from March to September 2010 is currently 83%. Though children and young people are encouraged to attend there remains an unacceptably high proportion of appointments that are missed or declined, and actions will continue ensure the availability of appointments and to support and encourage young people to attend in the coming year. The improved quality assurance and audit arrangements will also focus on the timely recording of these assessments.

5.2.4 Though the NHS has commissioned additional dental service capacity for looked after children the take-up of appointments has remained at 78-79% over recent years. There is some improvement in the take up of dental checks among younger children but there is a significant minority within the cohort of our most difficult to reach children aged 16-18 who continue to decline to attend appointments.

### **5.3 Staying Safe:**

- 5.3.1 The announced inspection of services to looked after children (OfSTED, January 2010) judged the safeguarding arrangements for looked after children to be adequate. The inspection of the Fostering Service (OfSTED, June 2010) judged provision to protect children from harm or neglect and to help them stay safe was good. The recent inspection of Adoption Services (Ofsted, January 2011) judged this area to be good.
- 5.3.2 Placement stability has been consistently above that of statistical neighbours over recent years at over 71%. This is a result of effective matching of carers and children and subsequent support for placements.
- 5.3.3 Since the last report systems have been put in place to ensure that the Children's Rights Service are informed when a child comes into care, or moves to a placement outside Leeds. They can then swiftly make contact with the child or young person and ensure they are aware of their rights and mechanisms and support any complaint that arises.
- 5.3.4 Improved quality assurance of looked after children's case files and a culture of regular audit and more rigorous supervision has delivered the improvement in files commented on during the recent OfSTED Fostering and Adoption Inspections.
- 5.3.4 Timeliness of Care reviews has improved from 71% in 2009-2010 to the current figure of 84% as a result of the completion of the reorganisation of the Independent Reviewing Officer service and changes in its leadership and management. This has also contributed to an increase in children and young people's participation in their reviews from 80% to 89% over the same period.

#### **5.4 Staying Safe: Focus for Development**

- 5.4.1 The improved timeliness of care reviews, the increased rigour provided through the Performance Improvement Plan, management intervention and the deployment of Advanced Practitioners have all contributed to improved quality and consistency in care planning but this remains a continued focus for the developing Integrated Looked After Children's Service.
- 5.4.2 Though there are effective strategies in place that are implemented by agencies when a child is found to be missing from care, National Indicator (NI71) has prompted a review of how those approaches can be improved. This includes more consistent practice in the recording of absence from care homes and the link between going missing and the risks of sexual exploitation. This includes the increased opportunities for support through the provision of return to home/care interviews through voluntary sector organisations and targeted training in Child Sexual Exploitation to Social Care staff, particularly those working in a residential setting.
- 5.4.3 The recent Fostering Inspection prompted a review of the membership and terms of reference of Fostering Panels which are now always quorate and have sufficient independent members.

#### **5.5 Enjoying and Achieving**

- 5.5.1 Both the announced inspection of services to looked after children (OfSTED, January 2010) and the recent inspection of the Fostering Service (OfSTED, June 2010) judged provision to help looked after children and young people enjoy and achieve as good. The Adoption Inspection (Ofsted January 2011) judged this element as outstanding.
- 5.5.2 Contextual Value Added (CVA) provides a way to compare groups of children and young people with different previous educational experience. It provides an estimate of progress that allows one year group to be compared with another group, even though the groups might have differing 'academic' potential.
- 5.5.3 The estimated CVA between Key Stages 1 and 2 was estimated for the first time in 2009 and yielded a value of 99.1. A score of approximately 100 is usually accepted as evidence that a cohort of children is achieving in line with expectations. The estimate for the 2010 looked after cohort is higher than in 2009, at 100.1.
- 5.5.4 The estimated CVA between Key Stages 2 and 4 in 2008 was 960 and in 2009 had risen to 980. In 2010 it reached 985 which, while still short of the 1000 that would suggest that the cohort was achieving as expected, does show a positive trend of improvement. It would place the Leeds Virtual School for Looked After Children 28th in a league table of Leeds High Schools based on the most recent data available, compared to 30th in 2009.
- 5.5.5 The funding provided by Education Leeds, AimHigher, and direct to the Virtual School through the 'Care Matters' component of the area based grant has allowed the seconded headteacher to ensure a wide range of additional educational support and guidance has been available which includes:
- 1-to-1 tuition by a trained teacher outside the school day;
  - Saturday activities for carers and looked after children;
  - homework clubs/study support supervised by undergraduates;
  - individual mentoring;
  - grants to schools to support children at risk of exclusion;
  - book bundles distributed through a partnership with the libraries service to every Year 3 and Year 5 looked after child in a Leeds mainstream school;
  - direct work with for children failing to engage with learning.
- 5.5.7 The school has worked with the Early Years service to require teachers in Children's Centres to set individual targets in the personal education plan from 2 years of age. This has contributed to ensuring that by the end of the Foundation Stage the percentage of looked after children who had been in care for at least 1 year and reached a good level of achievement had almost tripled (from 11% in 2008, when the data was recorded separately for the first time to 30% in 2010). Though it remains significantly lower than the Leeds average (53%) the rate of improvement is markedly greater and the gap has narrowed from 37% in 2008 to 23% in 2010.

- 5.5.8 By the end of Key Stage 1 the percentage of looked after children who had been in care for at least 1 year and achieved level 2 or above in the core subjects (61%, 54% and 63% in Reading, Writing and Maths, respectively) remains lower than all children (82%, 78 and 86%, respectively). However, Reading, Writing and Maths have increased by 12%, 11% and 14% respectively, since 2007. This is compared to broadly steady attainment over recent years by all children in Key Stage 1 indicating a narrowing of the gap between looked after and all pupils since 2007. The gap between looked after and other children in Leeds is now 4-6% narrower for each of Reading, Writing, and Maths than for England as a whole.
- 5.5.9 By the end of Key Stage 2 the percentage of looked after children who had been in care for at least 1 year and achieved level 4 or above in the core subjects (48% in both English and Maths) remains lower than all children (80%). English and Maths have risen by 8% and 12% respectively since 2007. While the percentage achieving Level 4+ in both subjects has varied significantly since 2007 there has been only a slight upward trend since 2007. The percentage achieving level 4 in Science had risen from 48% in 2007 to 58% in 2009 but Science ceased to be tested or reported in 2010. There has been broadly steady attainment by all pupils against these measures in recent years which has led to a narrowing of the gap at the end of Key Stage 2 between looked after and all pupils. The gap between looked after children and other children in Leeds is now 4% narrower for English than for England as a whole, while for Maths it remains 2% larger.
- 5.5.10 By the end of Key Stage 4 the percentage of looked after children who had been in care for at least 1 year and sat at least one qualification rose from 66% in 2008 to 90% in 2010. Those achieving 1+A\*-G rose from 62% in 2007 to 82% in 2010 and those achieving 5A\*-G from 39% to 57% over the same period. Those achieving 5A\*-C increased from 13% in 2007 to 35% in 2010 and those achieving 5A\*-C, including English and Maths, rose from 4% to 14%. In Leeds the gap in attainment between looked after and all children is now 4% narrower for the 5A+-G benchmark than for England as a whole. For 5+A\*-C is 8% narrower and for 5+A\*-C (including English and Maths) it is 5% narrower than for England as a whole. Only 35% of the 2009-2010 Year 11 cohort were not on the SEN Register, 10% were at the School Action level of intervention; 30% at School Action Plus and the remaining 25% had Statements of Special Education Needs.
- 5.5.11 Primary school attendance by looked after children (96.0%) has changed very little since 2007 but remains 1.7% higher than that of all children (94.3%). Persistent Absence among looked after children in primary school has declined further in 2010 (to 0.8%) compared to 2.5% among all children (all attendance data available for half-terms 1 – 4 of the last academic year). Attendance is very similar for every year group in the primary phase.
- 5.5.12 Secondary school attendance by looked after children (89.7%) remains lower than that of all children (91.6%) but has improved by 1.1% since 2007 compared to a 0.1% increase for all pupils. This narrowing of the gap in secondary attendance is also reflected in the rate of Persistent Absence among looked after children in secondary school. Though it remains high at 12.4% but this is a significant decrease from 13.2% in 2009 and 18.0% in 2007 and illustrates a narrowing of the gap with all pupils from 8.2% in 2007 to 5.0% in 2010 (all attendance data available for half-terms 1 – 4 of the last academic year).



- 5.5.13 The number of looked after children permanently excluded from Leeds schools has been reduced from eight in 2006 to zero in 2009 (there were, though, two permanent exclusions from the David Young Academy).
- 5.5.14 Rates of fixed term exclusion remain significantly higher for looked after children however the total number of days that looked after children lost to exclusion continued to fall, from 1094 in 2007 to 665.5 in 2009.
- 5.5.15 Analysis of the outcomes Year 11 in the Summer of 2010 have confirmed the value of specific educational support to looked after children; those who benefited from:
- Tuition during Key Stage 4: CVA was 998
  - Mentoring: CVA was 1020
  - Study Support: CVA was 1012

CVA for all of Year 11 was approximately 985.

## **5.6 Enjoying and Achieving: Focus for Development**

- 5.6.1 The pattern of attendance secondary school is very similar for looked after children and their non-looked after peers. It is only in Year 10, and markedly in Year 11, that the gap widens significantly. This does not reflect a falling off of attendance among looked after children who had attended well through primary school. Significant numbers of young people who failed to attend regularly in Year 10 and 11 had come into care in Year 9 or later and many had records of poor attendance prior to coming into care. There is good evidence, therefore, that it takes several years of stable care to impact on school attendance but it may also indicate that the Virtual School and its partners should invest more attention in teenagers who come into care in year 9 or later.
- 5.6.2 The Personal Education Plan (PEP) process has been thoroughly reviewed in partnership with the Independent Reviewing Officer team to sharpen its form and function and streamline plan completion through more effective links to existing school planning processes. It also reduces the administrative burden to schools and other professionals. The year from January 2011 will see the new process implemented as care reviews become due, with a review of the revised process at the end of the Summer Term of 2011.
- 5.6.4 One-to-one tuition by a trained teacher had a direct positive effect. The contextual value added (CVA) of the 27 Year 11 students who received tuition during their GCSE programmes was 998 compared to 985 for the whole year 11 cohort. Despite the very significant in-year cut in the area based grant in the Summer of 2010 (which removed 40% of the budget allocated to one-to-one tuition) up to 80 looked after children continue to benefit from tuition at any one time. This is, though, a marked decline from the 200 children and young people who were receiving tuition at any one time prior to that cut and is likely to impact on future outcomes if the funding through the statutory Personal Education Allowance is not maintained.

## **5.7 Making a Positive Contribution:**

- 5.7.1 In the announced inspection of Childrens Services this was judged as adequate, as it was in the fostering and adoption inspections.
- 5.7.2 The Leeds 'Find Your Talent' pilot linked looked after children with libraries, arts and

heritage activities.

Since mid-May 2010 the 'Creative Start Project' has delivered a range of arts provision into six Residential homes across Leeds – all aimed at developing a long term and sustainable interest in the arts among the young people.

- The project aims to work with six of the remaining residential homes between December 2010 and May 2011; there are plans to work with Wood Lane on a multi media project in the near future
- Creative Start has also funded visits to a variety of locations including the Yorkshire Sculpture Park and The Deep in Hull, and has brought in artist Tim Curtis to support staff and work with two small groups of autistic young people at Acorn Lodge to create artwork inspired by their days out. An exhibition at Armley Mills is being planned to celebrate the young people's creative work which will include photographs, sketch books, video and giant totem poles.

5.7.3 There is very good multi-agency support for looked after children at risk of offending, or if they offend. This gives them priority access to restorative interventions, support and positive activities that divert them from further offending. There are also strong linkages from the Neighbourhood Policing Teams to children's residential units. The impact of these strategies and activities has led to a decline in the number of LAC offences and a reduction in those going to Community Order/Custody.

#### **Offences committed by LAC & no. in Custody**

<b>Month</b>	<b>No. of Offences</b>	<b>No. in custody</b>
Nov-10	22	8
Oct-10	21	10
Sep-10	22	13
Aug-10	12	11
Jul-10	32	13
Jun-10	34	10

There has been a year on year reduction in the number of looked after children committing offences. In 2006/07 this was 113, 2007/08 – 112, 2008/09 the figure was 95 and in 2009/10 the number was 88.

5.7.4 All looked after children and care leavers have good access to independent, proactive, advocacy services through the independent Children's Rights Service commissioned from Barnados.

5.7.5 Looked after children and care leavers were involved with every senior appointment in CYPSC as well as the appointment of the new Director of Children's Services. They have also contributed to the development of services through:

- work to enable the more qualitative aspects of the Leeds Promise to Looked After Children to be assessed;
- The design and development of a 'sexual health bill of rights' supported by the Children's Rights service;
- the elected member Corporate Carer group's forward plan includes 6 monthly joint meetings with the Children in Care Council.

## **5.8 Making a Positive Contribution: Focus for Development**

- 5.8.1 Though every looked after child has access to the universal youth offer there are only informal links between youth services and looked after children. Discussions are taking place to define a more coherent offer to looked after children, particularly targeting the more vulnerable children and young people who tend to be placed in children's homes.
- 5.8.2 Though Breeze cards are now sent to all looked after children and there is an appropriate data sharing protocol in place it has not yet proved possible to track the use made of Breeze activities by looked after children.

## **5.9 Achieving Economic Well-being**

- 5.9.1 In the inspection of LAC services this was judged as adequate. In the fostering inspection this area was judged as good. It is not a judged area in adoption inspections.
- 5.9.2 Looked after children are prioritised by Connexions PAs working in schools and colleges. Every looked after child was offered appointments with a Connexions PA in Year 11 and the great majority accessed the service. There are 5 Personal Advisers who either work directly with the Pathway Planning Team or in partnership through secondment.
- 5.9.3 The percentage of looked after children who reached the end of Year 11 in the Summer of 2010 and are now in education, training or employment (EET) is 88% (116 young people). This is a rise of 3% from the figure of 85% at the same point in 2009 and 9% higher than in 2008. While this is still well below the EET figure for all children it is another significant improvement and is most likely related to the significant improvement in the outcomes achieved by looked after children in GCSE or equivalent qualifications this year.
- 5.9.4 Of the 85% who were EET in October 2009 the significant majority remain engaged with education, employment or training (77%) a year later. This is particularly true of the young people who had had statements of special educational needs while at school. All but 4 of the 27 children with a statement remain engaged with EET a year after leaving school.
- 5.9.5 There is significant support through AimHigher/Stepping Stones that has resulted in 32 care leavers being in higher education or embarked on higher degrees. This includes 10 first year undergraduates.
- 5.9.6 The agreed protocol between the Leeds Colleges and CYPSC has been in place for nearly 3 years and has led to better partnership working. There is now specific training offered to the Colleges by the Extended School and a 'Designated Tutor' has been identified in each college to act as a focus for support to looked after children and as an advocate for them. The Extended School also provides the colleges with information that enables them to identify looked after children at 16+ but also among the cohort of younger children working on college programmes while still at school.

5.9.7 Specific commissioning has ensured accommodation for care leavers has improved so the measure of care leavers in suitable accommodation rose from 86.8% in 2008-2009 to 89.1% by the end of Q2 of 2009-2010. This is linked to the collaboration of the CYPSC Pathway Planning team with GIPSIL in offering a small number of care leavers trial periods of supported independent living before they make the final step to accepting a tenancy. This pilot provides a model that could be applied to larger numbers of care leavers.

## **5.10 Achieving Economic Well-being: Focus for Development**

5.10.1 While every care leaver has a Care Plan, their contributions to it are inconsistent and the Care Plan does not always meet the requirements of the Pathway Planning process. The current review of the Pathway Planning Team and its place in a dedicated looked after children's service will ensure this improves.

5.10.2 Transition planning for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receiving services will become more consistent and support their transition into adult services or further education, employment or training through the work to develop an integrated disability service.

## **6.0 REGULATED SERVICES**

The regulated services to looked after children for which the local authority is responsible comprise residential children's homes and the city's adoption and fostering services. All these are subject to independent inspection by OfSTED.

The Corporate Carer Group forward plan includes a full annual review of each regulated service and each OfSTED Report and any resulting action plan is considered as they are published. This section of the report therefore presents only a very brief overview of each regulated service.

### **6.1 Residential Children's Homes**

6.1.1 Leeds has 13 children's homes, including East Moor Secure Children's Home. All of Leeds' residential provision is judged by Ofsted as satisfactory or good.

6.1.2 The New permanent Head of Looked after Children's Services commenced in post in late July 2010 And has made it a priority to strengthen the management arrangements for the children's homes, re-designating 4 experienced unit managers as senior unit managers. These have taken on supervisory responsibility for two units in addition to management of their own unit. Early feedback, including from OfSTED is that these arrangements have had an immediate and positive effect.

6.1.3 A review of the Statements of Purpose and Function of all the homes is in progress. Recommendations will be made to ensure the service is fit for purpose and able to meet identified demand. An area of particular focus will be on emergency placements.

### **6.2 Fostering Service**

6.2.1 The Fostering Service was judged inadequate in the Summer of 2008. However very significant improvement work along with the council's considerable additional financial investment in the service has brought about a significant change in the quality of service now offered. OfSTED judged all aspects of the service to be good in June 2010.

### **6.3 Adoption Service**

6.3.1 The Adoption Service was inspected by OfSTED in early December 2010 and the report was published in January 2011. The service was judged as good with outstanding features. A more detailed report about this inspection is included with the February Executive Board papers.

## **7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL POLICY AND GOVERNANCE**

7.1 Despite the broadly positive trend in outcomes for looked after children. These children remain a very high priority for the Council and its partners.

## **8.0 LEGAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 Looked after children's services are subject to a high degree of statutory and regulatory scrutiny. The new sufficiency requirements came into force in 2010 setting out new expectations of local authorities in ensuring the correct local provision around choice and provision in placements. This creates very significant challenges in what is already a swamped market. In 2011 new regulations come into force around care planning requirements, and in particular the role of Independent Reviewing Officers. This has led to the need for significant additional investment in the service in order to meet these requirements. All kinship care arrangements will also be subject to further regulation from April 2011 and a strategy is in development to ensure our practice meets the new requirements

8.2 There remain very significant challenges around the placement costs of looked after children. A placement strategy is now in place and the actions which have been put in place in the past year to address placement costs include

- a review of the commissioning arrangements which has created efficiencies in the procurement of placements,
- a new recruitment strategy for in house fostering provision to reduce reliance on external placements
- Revised gate keeping arrangements on decisions about admissions to care
- A new inter-agency panel to ensure appropriate joint funding of external placements
- A strengthened approach to the provision of adoption placements to improve the timeliness of adoptions and also to free up fostering places.
- Revised guidance and training across the service in care planning to reduce placement drift and to expedite appropriate discharges from care.

These actions will continue into the coming year and will include a significant review of residential provision to encourage a more preventative approach to working with families of older children. A review of the feasibility of charging for services is also under way.

Nevertheless, the remaining funding pressures cannot be under stated. A budget

action plan is in place, and the main focus in the coming year will be the 'turning the curve' approach to improving inter-agency work in order to prevent the need for children to become looked after, and to increase the opportunities for children who are in care to be discharged to appropriate, safe community arrangements.

- 8.3 The Government has announced that the national allocation for 'Services for Children in Care' will increase in 2011/12 to £58.4m which is higher than the original allocations (pre-ABG cut) for 2010/11. If the same distributional proportions are maintained when the funding is rolled into the formula grant, Leeds might expect to receive an allocation of around £0.93m in 2011-2012. However, applying assumptions to successive years from 2012/13 onwards, the national funding level then reduces significantly to just over £28m by 2014/15 which (if proportions are maintained) would mean funding of around £0.45m for Leeds.

## **9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Board:

Recognise that improving outcomes for looked after children in Leeds remains one of the highest priorities for children's services and the city and consider this report in light of this.

Acknowledge the key role that elected members, as corporate parents, play in supporting work with looked after children, both through formal arrangements such as Fostering and Adoption Panels and at a local level through links with, for example, schools, children's homes and foster carers, and continue to support and encourage this work.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Education Outcomes of looked After Children: January 2011

Ofsted inspection reports of adoption, fostering and residential services: Various 2010 – 2011