

**THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA**  
**FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**22 November 2010**

**REPORT BY DIRECTOR FOR FAMILY SERVICES**

**CORPORATE PARENTING**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

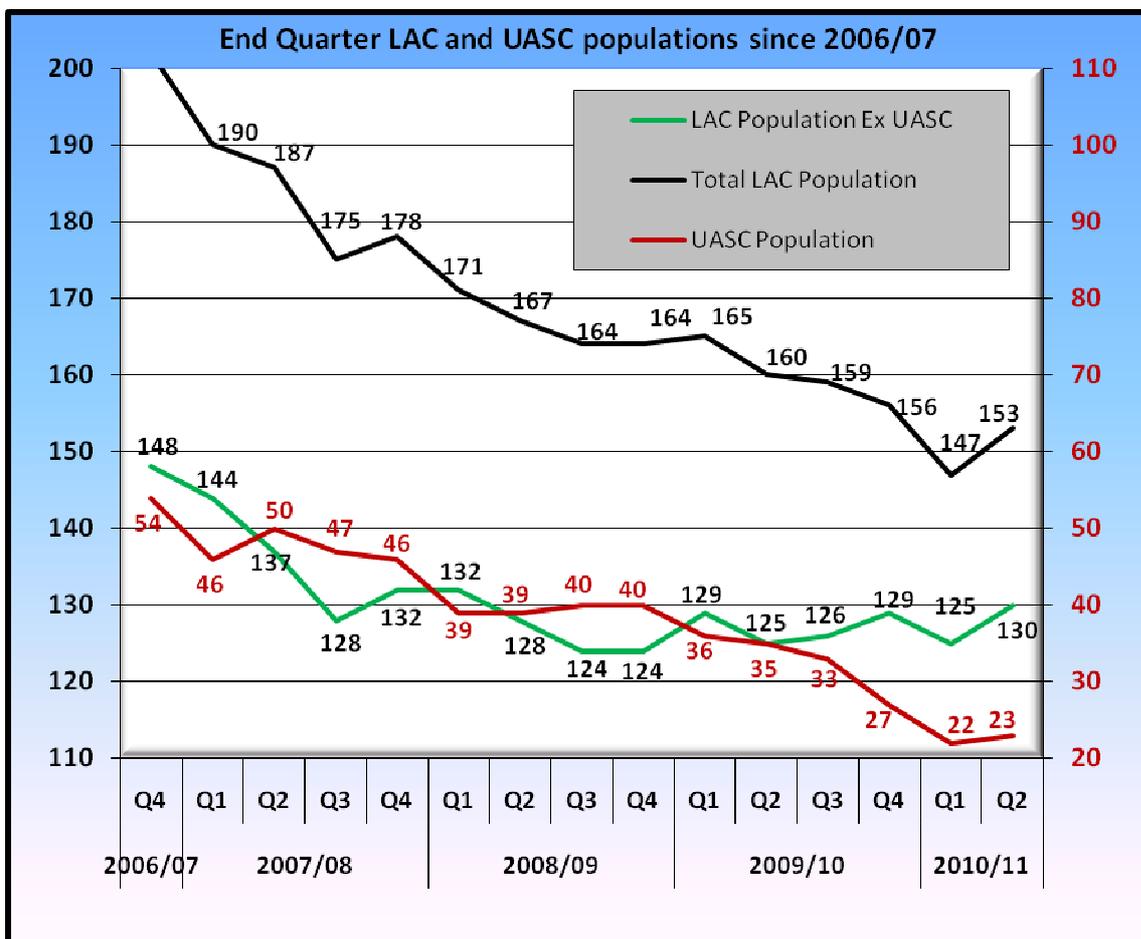
- 1.1 Corporate Parenting is the term used to refer to the collective responsibility of the Council to provide the best care and protection for children and young people who are 'looked after', that is, who are in public care. Effective corporate parenting will need the commitment from all Council employees and elected Members and an authority wide approach. These responsibilities for Local Authorities were first laid out in the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004 and reinforced in the Children and Young People's Act 2008.
- 1.2 The previous Government's Guidance for Councillors "*If this were my child*" reinforced the leading role of Councillors in ensuring that their Council acts as an effective corporate parent for every child in care, actively supporting standards of care and seeking high quality outcomes that every good parent would want for their child. "*When you became a councillor, you became responsible for ensuring that the council acts as the 'corporate parent' for all the children in its care.*" This duty is to promote positive outcomes, which encompass their education, their health and welfare, what they do in their leisure time and holidays, how they celebrate their culture and how they receive praise and encouragement for their achievements.
- 1.3 The term 'Looked After' refers to any child or young person for whom the authority has, or shares parental responsibility, or for whom the authority provides care and accommodation to the child or young person on behalf of their parent. Nationally there are 64,400 Looked After Children in England (DCSF data for year ending 31 March 2010). This is an increase of 3,500 children on the previous year.
- 1.4 The majority of the children and young people need alternative care and accommodation due to the inability of their prime care giver, for a range of reasons, to offer safe and effective caring within the family home and many, but not all, of our children and young people have suffered abuse or neglect of some form prior to coming into

our care. Children with disabilities who receive a regular series of short breaks through 'respite' arrangements are also classed as Looked After.

- 1.5 The term 'child' refers to any child or young person between 0-18 years of age. The Authority also has a duty and responsibility to those young people who leave care after the age of 16 years until they reach the age of 21 years, or 24 if they are in higher education.
- 1.6 Children and young people in and leaving care have been subject to a range of legislation and initiatives. The most recent is the Children and Young People's Act 2008 which contains core recognition of the role and responsibilities of the corporate parent and a move towards a more 'normative' approach to parenting, giving children in care the support and care that children in the wider community expect and receive from their parents.

## 2 LOCAL CONTEXT

- 2.1 The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea has experienced a steady decline in the number of children who are looked after in recent years as illustrated in the table below:



LAC = Looked After Children

UASC = Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

- 2.2 The reduction in the numbers of Looked After Children is attributed in part to more effective early intervention strategies and work to maintain children within the community. There has also been a steady decline in the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children arriving from abroad who have been allocated to this borough for their care. The Borough therefore has fewer Looked After Children per 10,000 of the population than our statistical neighbours.
- 2.3 There are indications in the last quarter of 2009-10 however that this decline in numbers may now be bottoming out. In part this is due to a recent legal judgement (the Southwark Judgement) which makes the presumption that homeless 16 and 17 year olds should be looked after but in addition it appears that we have reached the position where officers are clear that all the children currently being looked after have no other safe alternative for their care.
- 2.4 The overall reduction in the number of Looked After Children means that those who remain looked after are likely to have more intractable needs than previous groups. This impacts on outcomes and performance reporting.
- 2.5 The remainder of this report will therefore illustrate the progress that we have made in supporting positive outcomes for the Royal Borough's Looked After Children and the plans that we have to strengthen service provision.

### **3. OUTCOMES AND RESOURCES**

- 3.1 A previous report was submitted to this committee on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2010, which illustrated the work of the Royal Borough's Virtual School. This report highlighted the anticipated key stage results of our Looked After Children, and an overview of the considerable number of services offered to Looked After Children in order to improve their educational and life outcomes.
- 3.2 At the time of the submission of the report on the work of the Virtual School the authors were not in a position to present the GCSEs results for key stage 4 / Year 11 pupils. I am now able to report in 2010, 10 of the 12 children eligible sat GCSEs (83%, compared to 84% nationally in 2009). Five children (42%, compared with 19% nationally) achieved 5+ Grades A\*-C; for two (17%, compared to 10% nationally) this included English and mathematics. Eight achieved 5+ Grades A\*-G (67%, compared with 49%

nationally) and ten 1+ A\*-G (83%, compared with 71% nationally). Two did not sit GCSE qualifications but did sit other qualifications.

- 3.3 The stability of placement for our Looked After Children is an area of major importance as this is associated with a number of improved outcomes. There is strong evidence that a stable placement contributes to children's positive emotional development and general well being. It is also key to educational achievement and in providing the continuity necessary to access other important services. In 2009-10 the performance indicator relating to long term stability was in line with the national comparators. The continuing reduction in overall Looked After Children numbers means that the stability measure which concerns the percentage of children with three or more placements in one year remains challenging. There continues to be strong management focus on this indicator and performance in 2010-11.
- 3.4 The health assessments and dental checks for Looked After Children have seen an increase in performance to 92% in the last quarter of 2009-10. This is the best performance for any quarter in the last three years. Performance figures have improved because of better recording of dental checks and the overall positive contribution of the Virtual Health Service on health assessment delivery.
- 3.5 This is a significant area as the health of Looked After Children nationally is poorer than that of other children, with 45% of children in care assessed as having a mental health disorder compared with 10% of the general population. Within the last year there have been a number of significant developments with the creation of a Virtual Health Service, the appointment of a Co-ordinator and Lead Designated Nurse for Looked After Children, an additional Looked After Children's Nurse and an additional part time Clinical Psychologist. Within this Service is the provision of a Life Coach to work with our Looked After Children within our in-house residential homes.
- 3.6 A clinical psychology service continues to be provided to all Looked After Children of the Royal Borough. This has included direct support to foster and kinship carers as well as individual psychological therapy for children and young people. For the period from September 2009 to September 2010 53 cases were referred to this service, of which 39 have included direct follow up intervention with Looked After Children. The aim of this service is to provide individually tailored psychological interventions to improve emotional well-being of Looked After children and young people. The Clinical Psychologists have also commenced the running of a 'Fostering Changes' 12 week course which is open to all our foster carers, with the next cycle due to start in November 2010.

- 3.7 The clinical psychology service has also played a significant role in the early identification of mental health needs of Looked After Children in the borough through the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). Questionnaires were collected in 2009-10 from 39 children and young people between the ages of 4-16 years. If the SDQ outcomes raised significant concerns regarding their emotional well-being, these children and their carers are offered support from the clinical psychology service.
- 3.8 A second 'Stepping Up' celebration event was held on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2010, at Kensington Roof Gardens, to mark the achievements of our Looked After Children. The day started at 12 noon with the awards ceremony, and included a presentation by FUBU (For Us By Us - the Children in Care council), awards presented by the Mayor, the 'Minute Maestro' from Opera Holland Park, and a performance of Stomp Carmen by children and young people. In total, 76 Looked After Children, young people and care leavers attended, with 48 of their invited guests. Other attendees included staff, visitors from collaborative projects such as the Natural History Museum and Opera Holland Park, and VIPs including the Mayor, Cllr Baroness Ritchie and Cllr Cunningham.
- 3.9 The Teenagers to Work scheme has seen an increase in the numbers of young people participating and completing their work placement this year. This year's Teenagers to Work was the biggest yet, with over 31 young people participating (compared with 17 young people in 2009) in 26 placements across the borough. For two weeks, teenagers in our care and care leavers have been experiencing the world of work in various directorates across the Council. These placements included horticulture in Holland Park, film making at Leighton House, neighbourhood management, internet development, Opera Holland Park, safer neighbourhoods, the computer systems helpdesk, our libraries, the Town Hall and various play and youth centres. All the participants said that they would recommend the scheme to someone else.
- 3.10 The Royal Borough is a signatory to the London Pledge for Looked After Children. The London Pledge aims to ensure that children and young people in care across London have equal access to the same range of key services and support wherever they live, go to school or access employment or training opportunities in London.
- 3.11 The Royal Borough's local Pledge was launched during the year, following participation of young people in its development including 20 consultation sessions with staff to ensure that 'Our Promise to You' would be delivered. We worked closely with the Government

Office of London (GOL) to fulfil the aspirations of the London Pledge. In doing so, we found out that we were one of only four boroughs who worked directly with young people to develop a local pledge. Our Local Pledge contains 17 promises to our Looked After Children, including the use of a leisure card, a savings account for all Looked After Children born before September 2002 and systems in place for young people to obtain passports and driving licences.

- 3.12 The success of the Pledge has been recognised with a Corporate Parenting award nomination at the Children and Young People Now Awards, to be held on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2010. This nomination was made on the strength of our commitment to delivering high quality services and resources, and recognition of the process by which children and young people have been involved in its creation, content and delivery. A key component of this nomination also relates to the work on the 'These are Our Children – a guide for Councillors in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea', undertaken by Cllr Campbell together with officers. The document sets out the commitment by elected Members to meeting the needs of our Looked After Children as their Corporate Parent.

#### **4 EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

- 4.1 There have been a wide variety of activities offered to our Looked After Children, including Cllr Baroness Ritchie's Christmas Party; rock climbing; cinema trips such as to see Fantastic Mr Fox; theatre trips with children and young people being accompanied to see the Lion King, Oliver, and the Pied Piper at the Barbican, and Stomp Carmen. In total 101 children and young people have attended the activities arranged since September 2009, with a number of events planned until the end of the year.
- 4.2 The recruitment of a full time activities co-ordinator has greatly assisted in the development and delivery of a summer activities programme, which included the Teenagers to Work scheme, Create Art Project and work with the Foundling Museum. In addition the Life Chances budget continues to be utilised to fund a variety of activities such as music lessons, bicycles, travel, driving lessons and tests, and supporting a girls' group and a Care Leavers' skills group.
- 4.3 'Following Footprints', set up by the Natural History Museum's New Audiences Team and the Looked After Children's Support & Review Team, commenced in August 2009 with the programme being completed in January 2010. This was the third year of our involvement. Between August 2009 and January 2010, 9 Looked After Children and 6 families and a number of friends became

Science Educators and experts on some of the museum's millions of specimens. The children and young people were offered the opportunity to go behind the scenes with staff, to handle some of the museum's collection, meet working scientists and research a chosen specimen.

- 4.4 'Identity' was the theme of this year's Foundling Museum project, planned with Horniman's Museum as part of the Cultural Olympiad. It involved two artists working in different media over 5 sessions; and the resulting ceramic, paper and mixed-media work will be on display at the Foundling Museum from mid-December. 13 young people originally signed up for the project, 5 attended the first session and 4 participated in the final workshops. All the children who attended thoroughly enjoyed the experience.
- 4.5 A new project was offered as an alternative to the museum. The Robots Project was developed as the result of a new partnership with Royal Holloway University of London over the period of 12<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> April 2010. The aim was to teach young people to build and programme small robots to carry out a variety of tasks. This was attended by 4 Looked After Children.
- 4.6 The Corporate Parenting Panel continues to meet with a range of Looked After Children. This forum has provided direct feedback from Looked After Children as young as 10 to Care Leavers who are 21 years and over. The meetings have focused on topics such as going to university, leaving care, housing, the Pledge, activities and services provided. This has been supported by increased opportunities for consultation activities in order to help support children and young people's active participation. As a direct result young people have been trained and we seek to fully involve them in staff recruitment practices and training of foster carers.

## **5. FUTURE PLANS**

- 5.1 The development of a robust local pledge for Looked After Children and Care Leavers has been significant in committing to meet the needs of our Looked After Children. This is supported by a drive to ensure excellent quality services and a fair access to resources. A locality Team Manager has now been designated to take a strategic lead on our local Pledge, with the primary aim of ensuring that our frontline social work staff proactively take on the responsibilities of the Pledge, and understand that it is at the core of their commitment to our Looked After Children to deliver on our promises.

- 5.2 Central to the development of our Local Pledge was the active participation and consultation with Looked After Children in order to ensure that they are able to hold the Council to account for any disparities in the care that is provided and to help challenge any poor practice. Part of the strategic lead's role will be to ensure the continued participation of children and young people, and work with our Advocacy and Participation Officer to maximise opportunities. As part of the Royal Borough's commitment to proactively seeking the participation of children and young people, a web based system is being utilised as well as through FUBU (the Children in Care council).
- 5.3 A third Stepping Up Event is being organised to take place in the February 2011 half term. This is a key component of our Local Pledge and a successful forum for recognising and acknowledging the achievements of our Looked After Children. This year the young people involved are rising to the challenge of delivering this cost effectively as is fitting with the current financial climate.
- 5.4 A review of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) was undertaken in 2009 in order to ensure that we have robust mechanisms to obtain feedback from Looked After Children and that panel recommendations are being implemented in a systematic way. As a result it was agreed that the recommendations of the CPP are now passed down to the Looked After Children Service Development Group, where work is then allocated. This system will ensure that the recommendations of the CPP are acted on and there is a mechanism for feeding back to them.
- 5.5 Over the past two years The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea have worked in partnership with the Anna Freud Centre, in order to further understand the placement stability needs of our Looked After Children. This research project, known as the Best Outcomes Project, received three year funding from the Department of Health and is now commencing its evaluation stage. Dissemination of the research findings will be undertaken next year.
- 5.6 A Peer Mentoring scheme is currently being developed. The Royal Borough has received a financial contribution from the Greater London Authority to run a pilot programme which will train 10 of our care leavers to act as mentors for 10 of our Looked After Children. The programme will be called Impact and will run weekly on a Thursday evening until the end of March 2011.
- 5.7 Plans are fully underway for the fourth year of the 'Following Footprints' learning event at the Natural History Museum and seven groups, each comprising a carer and a Looked After Child as well as

invited family and friends, are to participate. This year the project is extended to young people in our residential placements, and museum staff (plus live specimens) will visit the homes to introduce them to the Museum's work, with the aim of encouraging some young people to take up further tailor-made opportunities.

- 5.8 Plans are currently underway to hold a joint Virtual Health Service and Virtual School Conference in the New Year, providing the opportunity for all key professionals, from fostering, social work, health and education to meet together in one forum to discuss the needs of our Looked After Children and plan how to further improve outcomes.

## **6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 None

## **7. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 A high proportion of our Looked After Children are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and we additionally provide respite care for children with disabilities. Therefore the development of services will further address the equality of service provision to these specific groups.
- 7.2 We have sought to meet these needs by holding events for Carnival, Eid, Black History Month and a Christmas party. We have also held a specific consultation with Children with Disabilities. Our Activities Officer also supports Children with Disabilities through targeted work. We continue to look at how events and activities reflect diverse needs through an analysis of ethnicity in the future.

## **8. SAFEGUARDING**

- 8.1 Ensuring that Looked After Children have access to and are supported in engaging with a range of services significantly helps to promote their outcomes across the five domains identified by Every Child Matters. The promotion of their safety, education, health, economic well being and the positive contribution they make are key features contained within this report, which helps to demonstrate the robust arrangements to safeguard and support the well being of this vulnerable group of children and young people.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 The Scrutiny Committee is invited to note the contents of the report.

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