

Looked After Children Investigation

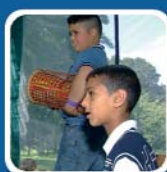
Evaluate the effectiveness of support for improving educational achievement and attendance.

The multi agency Looked After Children's Partnership Group strategically adopts a holistic approach to the needs of Looked After Children (LAC) recognising that action around a child's health or leisure will impact on their educational attainment. A range of services have been created to improve the overall developmental needs of LAC including Leisure Services, Health Services and Information and Advice Services. An example of this being a dedicated Health Team assesses the health needs of LAC on an annual basis, and identifies SEN requirements which may not have been picked up elsewhere, signposting to mainstream provision and providing annual reports.

Key measures for LAC's attendance at school shows that performance needs to improve. A revised attendance strategy group including the Education Social Work Manager and Social Care Manager meet to monitor and address attendance and target most vulnerable groups. A targeted approach between schools and social care staff to address attendance of children placed with parents from the first day of absence.

Addressing needs in a holistic way has positively impacted on improved educational attainment of LAC and Care Leavers. Through a Service Improvement approach there has been a detailed analysis of school attendance by placement type, age, gender, ethnicity and attainment. Support to improve educational attainment includes: a budget for tuition fees and purchase of computers; transition pack for children moving from Primary to Secondary education; purchase of an electronic personal education plan to improve planning between partner agencies; and provision of mentors for all young people in further education. The attainment of LAC demonstrates steady progress against SATS, GCSE's and NEET in relation to Care Leavers and as such needs to be viewed over a number of years due to the small size of the cohort for each year.

- Overall there has been an improving trend from 2001 - 2007 which shows a narrowing of the gap in all core subjects and at key stages 1 through to 4.
- Post 16 year olds in employment, Education and Training showed significant increase in 2006/07 with 89% of 19 year olds Leaving Care in EET.
- The highest number of Care Leavers attending University this year.
- A monitoring of LAC school attendance, with information provided to Social Workers so that remedial action can be taken, to be further enhanced via:
 - Monitoring process increased to weekly from December 2007.
 - A new protocol between schools, Education Bradford and Children's Social care to provide an early alert to Social Workers of non attendance from the first day of absence.
- Looked after Children award ceremony recognises the educational, social and leisure achievement of LAC and young people to further emphasise the holistic approach adopted by the LAC partnership.
- 'Raiseonline' shows all schools, at year 11, achieving expectations for Looked after Children.



Looked After Children Investigation

Establish what the impact of corporate parenting, staff deployment, recruitment and retention strategies have been.

In 2003 Bradford Council designated Looked After Children (LAC) a high priority group. Each LA department was challenged to consider how it could promote and develop its corporate parenting role. At the same time, within the Health Service, plans were put in place to establish a LAC health team to ensure that any child who is or becomes Looked After was allocated a dedicated health professional. The LAC Health Team provides signposting to sexual health advice and support services. Partner agency recognition of their corporate parenting responsibility led to the LAC Partnership Group being established embedding this responsibility at a strategic level. The Partnership Group has been independently audited and showcased at national conferences as an example of good practice in embedding corporate parenting responsibilities. A LAC strategy codifying the different roles of partner agencies in meeting the needs of LAC is in place.

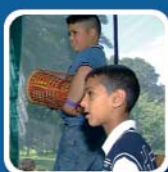
All staff within both residential and field work services are suitably qualified, including agency staff within residential units, who maintain cover for sickness or staff absence. Staff deployment regarding the transfer of social work responsibility when a young person reaches the age of 11 is now assessed on a case-by-case basis. Case responsibility is not transferred against the wishes or interests of the young person.

Residential services successfully recruited appropriately qualified staff following the building of the new children's homes. The introduction of the bursary scheme has resulted in Bradford being able to recruit Social Work staff as needed. Within Care Management Services there are very few vacancies across the whole service. All Social Workers are required to be registered with the General Social Care Council and Bradford has a well established progression process to ensure Social Workers develop skills and expertise.

The LAC Partnership Group has reviewed the training requirements of all staff working with LAC resulting in the development of an orientation power point presentation for new members of staff joining any partner organisation, a basic awareness training package and more specialist training. This ensures all staff have the necessary skills to understand and meet the needs of looked after children.

Overall Looked After Children in Bradford life chance opportunities have improved:

- Every Looked After Child has an allocated Social Worker, or level 3 Community Resource Worker (CRW) appropriately skilled, managed and supported, and a health nurse.
- The LAC Strategy identifies the 'Corporate Parenting' role of all partner agencies.
- All Social Work and residential staff are qualified.
- A Corporate parenting panel of elected members undertake regulation 33 visits and receive reports regarding the discharge of responsibilities for LAC.
- Social Work teams are fully staffed following bursary recruitment (only 3 or 4 vacancies across the whole Care Management Service).
- There is a robust recruitment strategy in Residential units and a recent recruitment process to fill vacant posts.
- Orientation training regarding Looked after Children provided to all partners.
- Basic awareness and specialist training regarding LAC is being reviewed.
- There is a high level of staff retention in Children's Social Care.



Looked After Children Investigation

Examine why the ratio of Children and Young People from BME heritage is low.

The rate of looked after children with BME heritage compared to the local population at 5th December 2007 was 0.76 compared with 0.7 in December 2006. This has been an issue that both the LAC Strategy Group and Children and Young People's Executive prioritised by agreeing to pilot the National Children's Bureau audit tool concerning the health and well being of children and young people from ethnic minority groups both within and leaving care. The partnership audit was completed on 31 October 2007 and has assisted in the identification of the policies, partnership arrangements, practice and participation in relation to children from ethnic minority groups.

- The audit with National Children's Bureau has identified further work streams to: understand more fully the factors which have resulted in low numbers of children from ethnic minority groups being within the LAC system which involves:
 - making contact with community based groups and organisations.
 - comparing Bradford's looked after population to that of Local Authorities with a similar ethnic make up and;
 - having further discussion with staff and children and young people themselves.
- The audit also describes the actions necessary to ensure that the needs of LAC from ethnic minority groups are recognised and addressed and includes:
 - where possible allocating Social Workers from a similar background to children using volunteers from BME communities.
 - running groups for children to explore identity issues through 'Seen and Heard' Service run by Barnardos.
 - celebrating religious festivals with children.
 - providing training to staff in relation to ethnicity and health issues.
 - specific work covering diversity training for all foster carers.
 - the establishment within Social care of a Black Case Panel

Further activity to be reported by March 2008 includes two internal Social care Service audits against:

- An examination of the thresholds applied to all LAC from BME communities who have entered the looked after system.
- An examination of all admissions to care between April and July 2007 to identify how thresholds are being applied in relation to all groups.



Looked After Children Investigation

Examine the commissioning strategy for placements along with the policy and practice around placing children with relatives and friends.

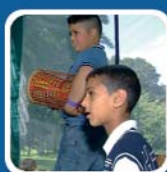
The issue is to ensure that there are placements available to meet the understood and assessed needs of children and young people becoming looked after. This will be reflected in placement stability indicators and also in indicators in relation to numbers of children placed for adoption; the latter is particularly affected by placements of children with family and friend carers. There are two aspects to the work in this area:

- the commissioning strategy for placements and;
- policy and practice around placing children with family and friends.

Bradford developed a commissioning strategy for placements in 2003. The strategy was designed to acquire more and locally based appropriate residential and fostering placements identified from a needs analysis undertaken to establish the type of placements required. The commissioning strategy focused on establishing sound contractual relations with providers and a limited number of three to five year block contracts with residential (2005-2008) and fostering providers (2006-2009) for the harder to place older age groups. As a result preliminary scoping of a revised commissioning strategy has been completed. The strategy will be fully revised by June 2008. Improved financial assistance to family and friends alongside social and emotional support following the creation of a dedicated team within the Adoption and Fostering Service has provided support and training to family and friend carers to ensure they receive the same service as agency carers.

Bradford is introducing a revised Permanency Policy with the intention to provide a mechanism whereby a family and friends placement can be converted to residence orders or special guardianship orders. This approach is intended to promote and encourage the take up of these two options by family and friends carers at an earlier stage.

- 2003 Commissioning strategy resulted in specific residential and foster placements being obtained. The strategy predicted 165 family and friend placements by 2006 and after an initial rise by 2007 the number was 164.
- The overall numbers of young people in residential care have remained stable since 2003.
- There has been an absolute growth in fostering and a shift in residential provision from purchased to in-house which has resulted in provision being met within budget since 2003, as a result of which 5 new Children's Homes were built in the District.
- Percentage of LAC with three or more placements is 11% in 2007.
- Percentage of children and young people under 16 looked after for 2½ years or more in a stable placement over 2 years is 69%.
- Improved financial and social/emotional support to family and friends carers has resulted in an increase in the number of younger children presented to fostering panel for matches.



Looked After Children Investigation

Establish the quality overall of residential accommodation and the impact of actions to address inspection issues.

The overall quality of residential accommodation can be demonstrated by the award to residential services of a Chartermark and re-awarding to Fostering and Adoption for the quality of their service provided. The inspections of residential units demonstrate good quality care and a continuing level of improvement across all judgement areas.

The annual performance assessment of 2007 identified three particular areas of development in relation to residential care:

- risk assessments in relation to young people going missing.
- the absence of a probationary period following the appointment of new staff and;
- the physical condition of residential units including the process for repairs and maintenance.

In relation to the three issues raised within the APA the following actions have been taken:

- a) Work has been concluded between the Council and West Yorkshire Police to establish a protocol around young people missing from care. Every residential unit now completes a risk assessment for every young person admitted to it's care using a prescribed format. A similar format is being developed in relation to young people in foster care.
- b) The Council's Human Resources department are driving forward changes to terms and conditions of relevant staff to be in place by March 2008.
- c) Issues regarding the maintenance and up keep of residential units occurred within the inspection of two particular homes where there was a need for decorating and repair. The situation in relation to each of these homes has now been rectified. Modified and improved systems are in place to maintain an appropriate level of maintenance and upkeep through the contractual arrangements with suppliers. Managers from residential services and buildings maintenance now review repair priorities frequently to ensure an appropriate and timely response.



Looked After Children Investigation

Check the arrangements for ensuring suitable accommodation for care leavers.

The requirement to ensure care leavers are provided with safe and secure accommodation that meets their needs is contained within the Looked after Children strategy and over seen by the Looked after Children's Multi-Agency Partnership.

The Leaving Care Service has a Senior Care Manager with a specific lead for accommodation, a housing development worker and housing support workers. Accommodation issues are monitored and reported on regularly. There are very good links with housing providers and young people, through pathway planning, are well prepared for the transition in to independence.

In addition the Divisional Services Manager with responsibility for the Leaving Care Service meets with the Council's Housing Department, Bradford Community Housing Trust and Supporting People officers to trouble shoot difficulties and ensure there is an overview regarding the housing need of Looked after Children and Care Leavers. In addition there is monitoring of the commissioned placements to ensure that support is available around young people's choices.

A range of accommodation is provided and includes:

- Supported lodgings, often foster carers change their registration, managed by the NCH Stepping Stones Project.
- Supported accommodation via a three year contract with Foundation Housing for 21 units for 16 to 18 year olds sought from social landlords with a "floating" outreach worker so that there is one worker per seven young people. The scheme is well used and there is work ongoing in setting up a "trainer flat" for planned short stays for young people as part of pre-tenancy work.
- A three year contract with Lighthouse Project to provide four units of supported accommodation in shared premises can be utilised at short notice. A review in relation to this type of accommodation will take place in 2008.
- Spot purchased accommodation from Supporting People providers ensures a range of hostel type provision and tenancies and includes specialist provision.

Monitoring of the commissioned placements to ensure that support is available around young people's choices shows that:

- There has been an increase in the numbers of young people leaving care being placed within suitable accommodation.
- No young person is placed in bed and breakfast unless it is their own choice and where they exercise this choice arrangements are made to ensure they receive ongoing support.
- As a consequence, improved stability is reflected in improved outcomes with 89% of 19 year-olds Leaving Care in education, employment or training.



Looked After Children Investigation

Evaluate the ways in which looked after children are enabled to make a positive contribution, including examining the number who are cautioned or convicted.

LAC are at a higher risk than their peers in relation to offending confirming the importance of ensuring that they have a full opportunity to participate in service development and contribute to future planning. Several specific services have been developed between Social Care Services and the YOT include:

- The appointment of a dedicated worker within the YOT to undertake preventive work with Looked after Children.
- A mentoring service for young people in residential care.
- A sports development officer is in post to further opportunities for looked after young people to be involved in sport and recreational opportunity.
- A protocol between Social Care, YOT and the police to report offences in relation to young people in residential care linked to the Crown Prosecution Service guidance.

Children's Services are fully committed to improving services via service user feedback. Children's Social Care commissioned Barnardos (Seen and Heard) to provide a participation and advocacy service for LAC and children with disabilities and introduced Participation Champions across all staff levels to ensure mechanisms are in place for participation with all service users and embedded in practice.

- Targeted work between Social Care and YOT has supported the reduction in offending rates where in 2006/07 14.07% of LAC received a caution, conviction or final warning compared to 15.2% in 2005/06
- Between October 2006 and March 2007, 46% of young people in residential care offended whereas, between April 2007 and September 2007 this reduced to 21%
- Seen and Heard (Barnardos) commissioned to provide a participation and advocacy service resulting in improvements through initiatives such as:
 - Looked After Children participation and advocacy service
 - U Can B Heard CAMHS User Participation Group
 - Children and young people Empowerment Group
- Focus groups of young people held within residential units lead to the revision of review documents.
- Question time events with Senior Managers across all agencies are in place.
- Young people contributed to the development of the LAC Strategy.
- The DCS meets with a representative LAC group on a regular basis.
- Young people have designed their own publications including Stand up and Be Counted written by young people for young people regarding their rights and services they can expect as Looked after Children.
- A number of DVD's/videos have also been produced by young people, including one for bullying, which have been used to help inform practice and service development.
- Looked after Children contribute to recruitment panels at all levels of service.
- Award ceremonies recognise the contribution of LAC and Care Leavers including the LAC education award ceremony, a Care Leavers event and Youth OSCARS.

