

Care Matters: transforming the lives of children and young people in care

Consultation Response Form

The closing date for this consultation is: 15
January 2007

Your comments must reach us by that date.

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If you have an enquiry relating to the policy content of this consultation you can contact Helen White by email: helen.white@dfes.gsi.gov.uk or by telephone: 0870 000 2288.

If you have a query relating to the consultation process you can contact the Consultation Unit by:

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Which of the following best describes you:

<input type="checkbox"/> Child in care (under 13)	<input type="checkbox"/> Child in care (under 18)	<input type="checkbox"/> Care leaver
<input type="checkbox"/> Foster carer	<input type="checkbox"/> Residential carer	<input type="checkbox"/> Professional working with young people
<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer working with young people	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other	

I am pleased to submit on behalf of Barnsley Children's Services our response to the Green Paper: Care Matters Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care. Our response incorporates comments received from a meeting of Barnsley Children's Services Scrutiny Commission which was held on the 5th January and records the views of a multi-agency consultation event which included carers, statutory, voluntary and community providers on the 9th January 2007

If you work with children or young people in care, which best describes the organisation you work in:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local authority	<input type="checkbox"/> School	<input type="checkbox"/> Further or higher education institution
<input type="checkbox"/> Private sector organisation	<input type="checkbox"/> Voluntary and community sector organisation	<input type="checkbox"/> Health organisation
<input type="checkbox"/> Youth justice organisation	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

Please Specify:

Chapter 1: The need for reform

1 Are the elements we suggest for our 'pledge' the right ones?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Yes,

We support the proposal to introduce a pledge to strengthen our corporate parenting role. We have adopted a similar approach in Barnsley however, we have referred to this as an 'entitlement' rather than a pledge to stress the proactive involvement of both the corporate parent and the child. It is important that the pledge not only highlights the services and rights a child can expect to receive, it must also state our ambitions for their childhood and future adult life. Furthermore, the pledge must detail the standards of care they can expect to receive, as good quality standards will support the provision of better care. Recognising the value of this proposal we advocate the development of a universal pledge for all children, not just those in care.

It is felt that the pledge's commitment to providing better sporting, leisure and voluntary activities and the provision of an independent advocate are attainable. Whilst in Barnsley we have already established the healthcare assessments advocated by the pledge, and these are working well. However, the item of the pledge which we believe may need revisiting is the promise to provide '24/7 support from their social worker or out of hours contact'. It is felt that this is a wonderful aspiration, but it is questioned if this is practical and whether or not the child's social worker is best placed to fulfil this role. If a child is in a placement would it not be their carer who fulfilled this role? Believing this pledge to be unworkable we are concerned that through its inclusion we may raise expectations unrealistically. We suggest that if this level of support is deemed appropriate/necessary that perhaps some innovative ways to enable children to communicate should be developed, for example a helpline.

We believe the pledge could be enhanced further by including the following:-

- A recognition that each child in care has unique needs and that we will ensure the service we provide meets their specific needs.
- A commitment to all children and young people to make informed choices. This pledge must reflect when a young person is emotionally ready to make choices and that as their corporate parent we must ensure these choices do not compromise their safety.
- A promise, that as their corporate parent, we will have an open door to support them at difficult stages of their lives.
- Access to mentoring and peer support.

- The provision of flexible gateways in and out of care, permitting a child who has chosen to leave care at 16 to enter should they wish.
- Ensure their emotional and well being needs are addressed..
- A commitment to their educational attainment both within school and their post 16 further education and training.
- Details of the responsibilities of their social worker.
- A guarantee to work on a multi-agency basis to ensure we respond fully to their needs.
- Details of their eligibility to adult services.

Despite our support for the pledge, we do believe that if resources are not made available, and it is not possible to recruit and retain social care staff, then we are potentially making an 'empty' pledge.

2 Are there other key barriers to attainment which we should address in order to transform outcomes?

Yes

No

Not Sure

We agree with the barriers to attainment detailed within the Green Paper and have identified, in addition, the following potential barriers to children in care:-

- Early years experiences.
- Thresholds to access services.
- Therapeutic needs resulting from traumatic pre-care experiences.
- Poor attachments issues, resulting in instable placements.
- An inability to monitor a child when they are placed with another authority and the need for reciprocal sharing arrangements.
- Lack of support and remuneration to those working with children and young people to enable them to fulfil their role.
- Stigma associated with being a looked after child
- Lack of self esteem and communication skills amongst looked after children.
- Access to CAMHS services.
- Not enough celebration of attainments and achievements.
- Lack of resources available to support their attainment, including issues relating to the recruitment and retention of social workers and foster carers.

3 What more can be done to reassert the responsibility of parents and help them to fulfill those responsibilities?

In Barnsley we recognise the important contribution of parenting programmes. We believe that parenting programmes need to be more universal, accessible and provided in a more consistent way. To encourage this there is also a need to remove the stigma associated with attending parenting programmes so it is regarded as a course you undertake to demonstrate you are a good parent. Furthermore, it is also identified that there is a need to specifically support fathers in their parenting role.

The extension of initiatives such as family group conferencing and peer support by parents, through models such as HomeStart, are welcomed. Children and families often find it difficult to speak at group conferences and an extension of the scheme therefore needs to consider how we can shift the power balance to enable the family to take control of decisions about their future. During the pre-care experience there is often a need for more specialised services e.g. therapy which can support both the parent and the child. It is important that Children's Service have the capacity to offer support to prevent family breakdown and not just respond when things have already gone wrong. Therefore, we recognise it is necessary to develop programmes which provide long term sustained support for families, but these also require long term funding.

There is a need to engage with parents so they are aware of their own responsibilities. It is questioned whether there is a need for an extension to legislative powers to enable us to do this.

Schools are well placed to enable support to reach parents. Their position enables them to provide accessible, non-stigmatising support for new parents, which could be provided through children's centres and nursery provision.

The experience and expertise of the community and voluntary sector means they are well placed to support parents and are often seen by parents as more accessible and less stigmatising than statutory services. The contribution they can make to supporting parenting should be explored.

It is recognised that there is often a dilemma between what is best for the child and what is best for the parent however, we believe through the provision of family support, key workers, mentors, parenting classes and support from school this matter can be addressed.

4 a) Do you agree that there is a need for a more systematic approach to sharing effective practice in children's services?

Yes

No

Not Sure

It is also important that we gather evidence of effective practice more systematically. There are many good pilot projects but this work is not collated to provide evidence to suggest whether they would be effective if introduced more broadly.

We welcome the introduction of a National Centre for Family Services but would be interested to know how this intends to link with the National Centre for Parenting as there may be significant overlap, particularly in the area of parenting skills and advice and support to families.

4 b) If so, how can we ensure maximum impact in supporting evidence-informed commissioning and practice?

-

5 What more can be done to support links between adult and children's services, particularly in relation to drug abuse and mental health support?

We believe that the following measures could support the development of links between adult and children's services:-

- The provision of earlier intervention.
- Joint training.
- Representation on local area action teams.
- Support to be offered through multi-disciplinary teams co-ordinated through schools.
- Adult's services to engage in the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and address the needs of children when developing plans for adults.
- Lower age boundaries.
- Shared funding.
- Work is required nationally on eligibility criteria for young people moving into Adult Services, for example some young people with learning or communication disabilities which are not severe, who move from a good level of support from leaving care services to very little or none at all in adult services. This can cause deterioration and create additional stress for all concerned. At the moment young people looked after can access support via Back-up up until the age of 21. If they are viewed By Children's Services as being vulnerable and needing some level of ongoing support they don't always meet the much higher thresholds to access services as vulnerable adults within Adult Services Continued support for these young adults should be an important part of the adult services prevention strategy. This is a general issue not confined to the looked after children population.

6 What more could be done to support family and friends carers?

Family and friends carers could be supported through the introduction of:-

- Increased use of alternative orders to support family and friends carers
- Careful assessment of family placements needs, as often patterns of poor parenting are passed within families.
- Guidance on attachment and the lasting impact on early life.
- Ongoing support at the earliest opportunity.
- Additional financial support to maintain children, many of whom will have additional needs as a result of their pre-care experience.
- Support and training in managing children, who may have complex emotional needs.
- More key workers to provide advice and training.
- Long term continuous support, monitoring carers and their level of need.

7 Is it right for us to work towards an increase in the number of children supported in families and, as a result, a small younger care population with more complex needs?

Yes

No

Not Sure

We agree with this proposal but stress that the measures introduced in question six must be in place to fully support its implementation. The provision of respite care and the shared care concept may also assist in making this a reality.

Chapter 3: The role of the corporate parent

8 Do the proposals in this chapter add up to a sufficient strengthening of the corporate parenting role? If not what more should be done?

Yes

No

Not Sure

We welcome the proposals to strengthen the corporate parenting role. Each authority must be obliged to undertake this role, but recognise there is a need to raise understanding of what the role involves. To strengthen the role of the corporate parent we believe it is important that all those responsible for the provision of services for children in care, not merely social care, acknowledge their responsibility as corporate parents. This can be achieved by re-enforcing to elected members the importance of their corporate parenting responsibilities and ensuring that each senior manager within Children's Services is an active corporate parent for children in care. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that corporate parenting responsibilities extend beyond the local authority and Children's Services, there needs to be a multi-agency understanding of what the role entails. To stress this shared responsibility perhaps we should refer to the role as the 'corporate family'.

We are interested to understand more about the proposal to strengthen corporate parenting through the introduction of a lead budget professional. We would appreciate further details about this role and its purpose, for example does this have to be performed by a social worker? Furthermore, any guidance produced to support this role should stress that when calculating a child's budget it is important to recognise that often a substantial contribution may often be required to ensure they receive the therapeutic support necessary to overcome disadvantages from the pre-care experience.

9 Would a 'social care practice' help give social workers more freedom to support children?

Yes

No

Not Sure

The proposal to introduce social care practice has received a mixed response. Predominantly there is scepticism surrounding their implementation. It is queried why, when the Every Child Matters agenda advocates we join services together to create a Children's Services Authority that we are seeking to create practices that will produce gaps and fragmentation in provision. It is felt that this model does not facilitate multi-agency working and the sharing of best practice. It is also stressed that social care practices could have a negative impact on local authority resources. If social care practices were to be 'independent organisations', current costs indicate that there would be a 33% premium in the costs of such services vis a vis the costs of local authority staff and this could have a major impact on the overall resource envelope available.

Within the local authority we would like to open up our practices and transform how we provide services but we have to manage a tension between the function we have to perform and the development of innovative practice. Social care managers have to make hard choices about how resources are spent, we must ensure the quality we are providing is as consistent as possible, and we are unsure if social care practices will be able to facilitate this. Are we not being naïve in thinking that social care practice, like local authority social care provision will have to be resource led? Rather than creating social care practices we would rather transform current ways of working to meet this need. This could potentially be achieved through replicating the idea of social care practices and devolving budgetary responsibilities down local authority management structures. This would provide practitioners with increased powers to decide which monies are spent to ensure the best possible outcomes for the child. Whilst if the local authority were able to provide the same level of care for their employees as that provided by independent social care practices we may be able to improve recruitment and retention and provide a more consistent parent for the children and young people. Social care practices

would seriously impact upon the recruitment and retention of social worker which is already a major problem for local authorities. If these go ahead and more qualified staff were to leave to join these practices it would have a serious impact on retaining staff to work with child protection case. Thus, reducing the capacity of local authorities to protect children in the first instance.

However, the voluntary and community sector have expressed that they would be interested in participating in the development of social care practices. A comment was received that these practices are long overdue and have the capacity to meet needs in depth.

It was felt that the Green Paper could provide greater clarity on the role and development of social care practice. Questions posed include:-

- What would be the regulatory body, are we correct in believing this would be CSCI?
- Would the practitioners need to be qualified social workers, as we do not think they necessarily should be and that multi-disciplinary team would be the way forward?

10 Should the Independent Visitor role be revitalised and renamed as 'independent advocate' to introduce advocacy as a key element of the role?

Yes

No

Not Sure

It is believed that these proposed changes would strengthen the role and provide young people with a clearer independent voice. However, when implementing this scheme consideration should be given to whether it will be possible to recruit sufficient independent advocates and whether or not this scheme should operate independently of the local Children's Services. For example, it may not be possible to recruit independent advocates if the role is unpaid. Furthermore, being an advocate may dissuade many people who volunteer their services. Many volunteers may lack the confidence or feel disempowered, when representing a child to a professional and therefore may not wish to become an advocate. Consequently, you potentially could lose good volunteers. Perhaps a two tier process could operate where a visitor becomes an advocate should they both wish.

Chapter 4: Ensuring children are in the right placements

11 a) Should a 'tiered' approach to fostering placements be developed?

Yes

No

Not Sure

This approach is welcomed. In Barnsley we currently set foster carer fees in accordance with training and qualifications and believe it is important to recognise their qualifications. It is felt when implementing this model it is important that there is an assessment tool which is able to accurately assess a child's level of need and a carers ability to respond to these need furthermore, we must ensure the system is flexible to enable:-

- Carers to be approved to care for children from a number of tiers, they should not be restricted to only one.
- That those carers approved to work with children of higher tiers are not financially penalised if they are asked to care for a child from a lower tier.
- Carers should not be financially penalised if they support a child who outcomes improve and consequently move down a tier.
- If we are proposing to train the foster carer as a professional then their fees should be set to enable them not have to take further paid work, recognising foster care as their profession.

Our only concerns in relation to the implementation of this model is that it could potentially reduce the number of foster carers if there are only a limited number of carers who are able to respond to a specific child's level of need. Furthermore, are we potentially labelling children and young people by associating them with a tier, we question how would this feel for the child?

In relation to this model we are interested to clarify:-

- Whether the fee given is link to the child's level of need or the qualification of the foster carer?
- If there are any intensions to introduce a tiered model of placement for family and friends carers?

11 b) If so, should this be underpinned by a formal qualification framework?

Yes

No

Not Sure

A tiered approach should enable foster carers to work towards a formal qualification, acting as a skills escalator.

12 How can we increase placement choice without increasing financial burdens on the system?

In consultation we were unable to identify any options to increase placement choice that would not involve any additional costs. It is important to recognise that it only through having under-occupancy in the system that we can provide placement choice.

13 Should local authorities be required to consider whether disabled children in 52 week specialist residential provision should have the 'looked after' status?

Yes

No

Not Sure

This proposals needs to be discussed and developed specifically in consultation with the families of disabled children. Many of these families play an active role in their child's life, and therefore may not welcome, and be upset if, their child is classified as 'looked after'.

Chapter 5: A first class education

14 How might the role of the Designated Teacher for children in care be strengthened further?

The role of the designated teacher could be strengthened through the:-

- Provision of more specific targeted training, which includes training on the experiences of looked after children.
- Greater clarity about their role to provide consistency across both schools and the children and young people they should support. For example, within their role should they work with children in kinship placements, as many young people placed with relatives have similar issues to those in statutory arrangements?
- Development of stronger links with the local multi-disciplinary children's services teams.
- Improved networking amongst designated teachers, perhaps through establishing a message board upon which they are able to share concerns, best practice etc.
- Recognition that the designated teacher has a different role in primary schools where they provide support to nurture the child as opposed to secondary school where they focus upon outcomes.
- If the child wishes they should have the opportunity to have contact with their designated teacher and to have an assessment of whether their real needs are being addressed.
- Introducing a designated teacher for post 16 education.

In addition, perhaps through strengthening the role of the designated teacher perhaps the Green Paper provides the opportunity to created 'designated social workers' to represent the commitment to the provision of consistent social care.

15 How would a 'virtual headteacher' best raise standards for children in care?

It is believed that the role of the virtual head teacher would be useful to set more exacting standards for looked after children. The role has the potential to champion looked after children, act as an adviser to the head teacher, be a peer advocate to ensure quality teaching, identify needs, troubleshoot problems, and develop regional and national links. It is important that the remit also includes the provision of support to looked after children who are placed out of authority. To enable this role to succeed it is important that it is established as a full time post and not an existing duty to add on to someone's existing role. Furthermore, the virtual head teacher should be placed in a virtual school with a real budget. However, we believe that it is important to stress that the introduction of this role must not replace the necessity for all head teacher to have a personal sense of responsibility to support looked after children within their school

We would be interested having more detail about the composition of this role, for example;-

- What powers will the virtual head teacher have?
- Will they work alongside the local education authority to ensure the appropriate progress of looked after children in schools?
- Does the virtual head teacher have to be a former head teacher? The role could provide supervision and support to teachers about issues impacting on looked after children and it is questioned to provide this support you do not necessarily need to be a teacher.

16 What more can be done to reinforce the educational role of the carer?

The Life Chances Team in Barnsley support looked after children to improve health and educational outcomes. A team such as this could be invaluable to support carers in their educational role and provide out of school tuition. In addition, we believe the introduction of the following measures would contribute to strengthening the educational role of the carers:-

- Set clear expectations for foster carers regarding their role in education.
- Increase the availability and quality of training.
- Provide carers with consistent support and ensure that mechanisms are in place to keep them informed of educational developments.
- Ensure schools enable carers to engage and empower them to participate.
- Social workers and support workers for foster carers to have a better understanding of education to enable them to offer appropriate advice and support.

Education could form a more significant part of the initial assessment for foster carers as it has been demonstrated that parental education and attitudes have a key impact on the educational outcomes of the child. However, this may act as a deterrent and result in a reduction in the number of available foster carers

17 Are the measures proposed in relation to the Further Education sector sufficient to achieve a step change in outcomes for young people in and leaving care?

Yes

No

Not Sure

It is felt the Green Paper does not provide sufficient detail about the provision of post 16 education and training for looked after children. It is recognised that the provision of a national minimum bursary is an important step but to enable young people to engage in higher education it is also important that more localised degree courses are established in local colleges and universities to increase accessibility and that methods are developed to engage those young people who have become disengaged with education and to support them. It is imperative young people in care are provided with an open door into further and higher education. Furthermore, it is recognised that young people often lack both role models and the knowledge and experience of what further education may involve and this could be increased through foster carer training and the existing proposals within the Green Paper to encourage visits to further and higher education institutions. When planning to improve outcomes for those making the transition into further education we must not forget the important role the care plan makes in supporting them in this process.

Chapter 6: Life outside school

18 Have we set out the right features in the comprehensive model of health care for children in care?

Yes

No

Not Sure

It is felt that this model does contain the right features to respond to the needs of looked after children, and is particularly comprehensive in addressing the needs of children up to school age. To support this model we believe that we should engage young people in the importance of looking after their own health early in their lives. To enable this teams such as Barnsley's Life Chances Team could be developed. Furthermore, additional training could be given to G.P's to support this model and enable them to understand and support the needs of looked after children, and possibly to support them in this role a designated G.P. for looked after children could be appointed. We particularly feel the proposal to introduce a toolkit for carers and teaching staff around sex and relations education would be useful, and that this has the potential to be extended to children outside of the care system. However, we are concerned some young people may choose not to engage in a health assessment if it is linked to screening for substance misuse screening and are interested to explore how we can support young women who are not ready to disclose that they are pregnant.

19 What more could we do to help young people in care to participate in sporting, leisure and cultural activities?

We are supportive of providing free or subsidised access to sport and leisure facilities and support the idea of introducing a pack for foster carers to inform them of activities in the local area. However, there are currently a limited number of leisure and cultural activities available at a local level therefore, when introducing this proposal we believe that it should enable looked after children to receive free access to activities across local authority boundaries, and that the availability of these activities should also be published in the foster carer pack.

To enhance the proposals contained within the Green Paper we believe that as well as undertaking activities to encourage young people to participate in out of school activities, encouragement should also be given to foster carers as children and young people are often reluctant to attend events if they are unsupported. We can monitor what activities looked after children are involved in at school and use this as a vehicle to encourage their participation whilst, local performing arts development services and sports coordinators could be

given the remit to engage young people in care.

20 Is the approach to supporting children in care who enter youth custody the right one?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Children in custody should still be regarded as children in care and should be supported on leaving custody. However, in the current situation with many social service department understaffed, this places additional strain on already limited resources as once a child goes into custody they are often placed at a considerable distance from their responsible authority which makes visiting a maintaining a close relationship very difficult. We believe that as their corporate parent, the local authority, should support them upon leaving custody and to enable this we should ensure a plan to support a young person to leave custody is begun halfway through their sentence. We consider the following to be barriers for young people when leaving custody that need to be addressed:-

- Issues returning to their original placement.
- Lack of family group conferencing.
- Limited post 16 progression opportunities.
- The need for more supported living accommodation

21 What more can be done to support the role of carers in managing behaviour within the home?

The following suggestions are presented as methods of supporting care to manage behaviour in the home:-

- Training. For example, this could include parenting training, but also carers often need specific training to enable them to understand the process of attachment and the difficulties experienced by children who have poor attachments.
- The provision of services through a multi agency team around the child approach.
- Ongoing clinical supervision and support from social care staff.
- Joint agreements to assist them in managing behaviour could be established.
- Regular contact with someone with experience in caring for looked after children.
- Provision of outreach support from children's centres/schools/nursery

nurses.

- Appoint specialists to assist families who have high risk cases.
- Social workers to visit looked after children in residential care on a regular basis e.g. monthly but always in line with the young person's individual care plan.

Chapter 7: Making the transition to adult life

22 Should young people be allowed to remain with their foster families up to the age of 21, including when the young person is at university?

Yes

No

Not Sure

In Barnsley we believe the concept of transition into adult life rather than leaving care should be fully supported. However, we urge that before such a decision is made, that the child or young person has to discuss this matter with an independent critical friend/mentor who can advise them.

We appreciate this initiative enables us to be more proactive corporate parents, raises young peoples expectations, provides an environment conducive to learning and support them in developing a successful career. Yet, we also recognise that this may result in significant cost implications and will necessitate that we have a greater pool of foster carers. To support our understanding of this initiative we would appreciate further details on:-

- Who will put forward the funding to enable a young person to remain in care until the age of 21, this will have significant cost implications?
- Would like to know more about the structure of payment for the foster carer. Would they receive a reduced rate in recognition that the young person may be spending most of their time away from home?
- If this is the case what will be done to encourage foster carers to undertake this role if they are to receive a lower level of income?
- What will we offer to young people in residential care to support them remain in care up to the age of 21?
- How do we balance young people's right to stay in care if they are disengaged?

23 What is the best way of ensuring greater availability of dedicated supported accommodation for young people making the transition to adulthood?

In Barnsley we are working in conjunction with our arms length housing organisation to increase the availability of supported housing for young people making the transition into adulthood. It is felt that the Green Paper could support young people further by ensuring that pathway plans cater for individual needs and choice, that they are supported by out reach residential and foster carer, and that there should be provided with an open gateway to enable a young person who leaves at the age of 16 to return to the care of the local authority should they wish.

24 Are there other ways in which we can increase the number of children in care progressing to university?

We agree that higher education should be promoted as a realistic possibility for children in care. To enable this we should engage foster carer and social workers in understanding young people's needs as they prepare for this transition, and use the role of the learning mentor to provide young people with support within school. It is important to establish stability as this provides a foundation to enable young people to progress to university; this can be achieved by ensuring that young people have accommodation to return to during long breaks and have access to all the equipment they require. Furthermore, innovative ways could be developed to enable young people attend university through initiatives such as corporate apprenticeships.

Chapter 8: Making the system work

25 Should we introduce a new power for local authorities to intervene in schools performing poorly for children in care?

Yes

No

Not Sure

It is questioned if this is practical considering that many schools only have a small number of looked after children as; it could be difficult to demonstrate whether the school performs poorly for looked after children or that it is merely having difficulties with a specific child. We do not feel it is necessary for yet another power of intervention; rather we should identify best practice and acknowledge where systems are working well and adopt these. To enable this we believe we need to develop a culture of working with and in support of looked after children, and to facilitate this we must improve information sharing to ensure that schools are fully aware of the number of looked after children on their register and ensure that governors have an interest in the experience of LAC in their schools.

26 What more should we do to give children in care a greater say in decisions which affect them?

We embrace the introduction of the Children in Care Council, as in Barnsley we have a similar group called 'Children First'. We suggest however, that the group focuses on their needs as a child and appose to their label as a child in care.

Many children in care feel that they are powerless to affect outcomes and many do not bother to engage with formal decision making processes. Independent advocates and counsellors who can support a young person in exploring what they want and develop their confidence to speak out, can assist in this process. Carers need to be more skilled in helping young people feel in control of their lives and in helping them to express their wishes. We need to ensure that young people feel valued and that they believe we are listening to what young people have to say. To ensure this we need to check their satisfaction levels when they have been consulted, do they feel they have been listen to?

Reviews are daunting experience for children and young people, they often feel powerless, not listened to and surrounded by adults. To empower the child and enable them to feel comfortable in the review it should be centred around what they wish to talk about.

A dedicated looked after children social work team provides children in care with better relationships and continuity and therefore they often feel more able to contribute to decisions that affect them. Whilst recognising that some children find it difficult to challenge an adult we therefore recognised the importance of the proposal to introduce independent advocates. We welcome that Green Paper is committed to giving children in care greater voice and influence and believe this should be promoted for all young people on a broader

level.

27 How can Independent Reviewing Officers be made more independent and their role strengthened?

We do not believe that by placing Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) outside of the local authority that it will strengthen their role. We appreciate that the Green Paper is concerned that IRO's currently do not challenge the system but we feel in Barnsley IRO's do not shy away from this and they are afforded independence as they do not sit within Children's Social Services. To reflect the new Children's Services Authority it is felt that their experience could be broadened so that rather than having experience of social care they also have an understanding of education, health needs and the opportunities offered by the voluntary and community sector. We are concerned that if the IRO is employed by an independent agency they will not understand how the local authority operates and will not have established networks. Furthermore, it is feared that through giving IRO's greater independence and power they could position themselves as managers for cases, for which, they lack the responsibility and accountability. It is simplistic to regard outsourcing as necessarily more effective and efficient.

28 What key outcomes should we measure to assess whether we are being successful in transforming the lives of children and young people in care?

Detailed below is a summary of some of the key outcome measures. These have been divided in to short term outcomes that will become apparent during childhood and long term outcomes that will not become apparent until the young person is in adulthood.

Short term:-

- Engagement in early years services.
- Educational outcomes.
- Higher education expectations of young people.
- Do a young person attend their own reviews?
- Access to activities/services when children are in residential/foster care.
- Our investment in carers is at least adequate.
- Health and referrals to mental health services.
- Crime statistics for LAC and the numbers of young people in custody.
- Young people reporting that they have developed friendships and other significant relationships.
- Ability to communicate/self confidence and social relationships.
- Happiness.

- Sustainability of placements.
- Suicide attempts.
- Self harm amongst young people in care.

Longer term:-

- Number of care leavers in employment.
- Divorce rates/ability to sustain long term relationships.
- Number of care leavers in prison.
- Adult mental health services.
- Number of young people in care whose parents were in care.

These proposed measures clearly reflect the Every Child Matters outcomes. However, it is important to sound principles not just to measure set targets. Furthermore, recognising that each young person has their own set of personalised outcomes to support them in their development, as for young people progress rather than focus on their outputs.

29 Please use this space for any general comments you would like to make

The overall impression of Barnsley's Children's Services is that the Green Paper is a positive document in the development of the Children's Services agenda. It is also welcomed in that it gives a positive endorsement to the direction of travel that is either current practice or proposed practice in Barnsley. Our overriding concern is the implication of the Green Paper for resources and capacity of the council. Any additional resources and capacity building that will arise from the implementation of the proposals, has to be fully funded by additional resources from the Treasury or other centrally disposed resource. We would also be interested to note the evidence of the efficiency savings that may be generated through the synergy of the Children's Services agenda and the new ways of working emerging and support the investigation of these areas, and request that these results are made available for consideration.

It is disappointing that the Green Paper does not include more detailed proposals to address the current lack of comparative national and local performance information relating to 'children in care' and particularly to make this available as a tracking measure throughout, rather than once a child has left the system. The paper could progress this through defining nationally how data on looked after children will be collected. This is necessary to develop a robust picture of the attainment of looked after children and is essential due to the small number of looked after children in each school. Furthermore, it could provide a cycle for recording measurement of the outcomes of looked after children, we suggested this is best done three times a year. Whilst it is

important to establish what we term as a looked after child, the current definition used is a child who has been looked after over the last 12 months. We believe this definition should include all looked after children in Barnsley including those from Barnsley who are educated by another local authority. We are doing some localise work on this matter but believe the Green Paper is a vehicle which could enable this agenda to be established nationally.

30 Please let us have your views on responding to this consultation. For instance did you have any difficulty understanding any of the questions and did you think we had the right number or type of questions?

-

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply

Here at the Department for Education and Skills we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, would it be alright if we were to contact you again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

Yes

No

All UK national public consultations are required to conform to the following standards:

1. Consult widely throughout the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.
2. Be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.
3. Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.
4. Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy.
5. Monitor your department's effectiveness at consultation, including through the use of a designated consultation co-ordinator.
6. Ensure your consultation follows better regulation best practice, including carrying out a Regulatory Impact Assessment if appropriate.

Further information on the Code of Practice can be accessed through the Cabinet Office Website: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/regulation/consultation-guidance/content/introduction/index.asp>

Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.

Completed questionnaires and other responses should be sent to the address shown below by 15 January 2007

Send by post to: Consultation Unit, Area 1A, Castle View House, East Lane, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 2GJ

Send by e-mail to: carematters.consultation@dfes.gsi.gov.uk