

THE EXECUTIVE

14 DECEMBER 2004

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE EDUCATION OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN		FOR INFORMATION
<p>This report provides an update on the Education of Looked After Children at the request of the Executive.</p> <p>Summary</p> <p>This report describes developments and progress to date in the Looked After Children Health and Education Service (LACHES).</p> <p>Recommendation</p> <p>The Executive is asked to note the developments of LACHES since July 2004.</p>		
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1. Background

- 1.1 LACHES was transferred from DEAL to Social Services in July 2004. The purpose and function of LACHES is to improve the education and health of looked after children. At the time of transfer, and as detailed in the Executive Report of 29 June 2004 (Minute 45 refers), additional resources of £255,000 were allocated to LACHES to fund a number of initiatives to meet our targets and improve the Council's overall performance.

2. Current Position

- 2.1 We are required to report to the DfES annually the number of children aged 16+ that left care during the year who achieved at least 1 GCSE (grade A* - G) or equivalent. The definition of 'equivalent qualifications' is very strict and does not allow us to include NVQs, although GNVQs and GCSE short courses can be included. Children looked after under respite arrangements and unaccompanied asylum seeking children who have been looked after for less than 2 years at the time they leave care are also excluded from the count.

Since the end of March 2004 our performance has risen from 15% to 20%. Our performance has increased because 10 of the 50 young people who have left care to date (between April 04 – Oct 04) have achieved at least 1 GCSE or equivalent qualification. In the whole of 2003/2004 only 8 of a total cohort of 55 who left care achieved at least 1 GCSE or equivalent. This shows that our performance to date is better than we achieved in the whole of 03/04.

Eighteen young people took GCSE exams this year out of a possible cohort of forty one. Of the eighteen that sat GCSEs 100% achieved at least one GCSE grade A-G. Fourteen of these young people achieved five GCSEs grade A-G. This was an increase of one compared to last year.

LACHES is working with the twenty three pupils who did not sit any exams to engage them to consider working towards qualifications, training or employment. These young people did not sit exams for a variety of reasons: some of them were experiencing mental health problems, some had moved placements, and in one case the young person was given a custodial sentence.

2.2 Our Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) target for 2006 is fourteen looked after children achieving five A-C GCSEs. Our cumulative total against the LPSA target stands at four looked after children having achieved five A-C GCSEs following this year's exam results. To meet our LPSA we now need a further ten looked after children to achieve five A-C by the time they leave care and by March 2006. Whilst we recognise that this an ambitious target, we are working hard to deliver against this.

2.3 LACHES is working with the following cohorts of looked after children:

2.3.1 Young people from the 2003/2004 cohort who can re-sit their exams in June 2005 and who could potentially increase the number of GCSEs they obtained and improve their grades.

2.3.2 Looked after children who did not sit their GCSEs in summer 2004.

2.3.3 Looked after children who will take GCSEs summer 2005.

The service is also carrying out a piece of work with looked after children who sat their GCSEs two years ago, to understand what could have happened differently. This is the cohort of pupils whose GCSE results contributed to our poor performance of 15%.

2.4 The performance indicator that measures the educational achievements of those leaving care aged 16+ is identified as a *Key Threshold* indicator which can influence the star rating that we receive. To reach the minimum threshold for this indicator we must achieve a score of at least 25% by the end of March 2005. Performance at the end of October 2004 stood at 20% and we are projecting a result of 26.4% by the end of the March 2005.

3. Developments

- 3.1 A range of support services are in place to support the educational achievement of looked after children. A Homework Club is provided weekly on a Saturday morning and currently fifteen young people are attending regularly. Booster classes are going to be available in the New Year alongside individual tuition to enable young people to maintain progress in specific subjects.
- 3.2 We are also exploring vocational opportunities and training and further education courses for looked after children. Discussions have taken place in relation to Harmony House providing NVQ Hairdressing, Customer Care and Woodwork classes in the New Year. Linked to these programmes Harmony House will provide ESOL sessions for unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- 3.3 A mentoring scheme transferred into the LACHES Team on the 1 November 2004 from DEAL. All looked after children and young people will have a mentor by March 2005. This will include children placed out of borough.
- 3.4 A group of young people 16 –18 years were taken on a residential activity weekend to focus on self esteem, education opportunities, training and employment. A representative from Gateway was also invited and presented on career opportunities with NHS. As a result, three young people have had interviews with a view to begin training for careers in the NHS.
- 3.5 Links have been forged with the local Chamber of Commerce and several local businesses have agreed to launch a scheme for looked after children that will give them discount on local shopping. The scheme is called COOL DEAL and will be launched in the New Year. The purpose of the scheme is to offer an additional benefit to looked after children who stay in education. It is hoped that this card will boost looked after children's self esteem and reinforce the positive outcomes of staying in education. By forging partnerships with the local business community we may increase access to work placement opportunities for looked after children.

4. Education of Looked After Children

- 4.1 As a result of improved joint working between Social Services, Education and Schools, 97% of looked after children have a Personal Education Plan in place (PEPs) as at the end of October 2004. PEPs will be regularly updated and reviewed to ensure that all our young people are supported continuously.
- 4.2 A programme of training and support for LAC Designated Teachers, Governors, Foster Carers and Social Workers is in place. This is designed to ensure that all professionals involved with young people understand their role in supporting their educational achievement. The first training sessions took place on the 2 November 2004. Further sessions are booked throughout the rest of this year up until July 2005. The response has been excellent and most places are booked up already.
- 4.3 Although we are targeting young people who did not sit their GCSEs in 2004 and who will make a difference to our LPSA target this year, we are also working to ensure that young people in Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 have access to education support so that improved performance can be sustained over years ahead.

5. Health of looked after children

- 5.1 Health and dental checks of looked after children are also a key priority for LACHES. By ensuring that they have health checks, we support them to gain awareness of good health and deal with any existing health related difficulties promptly.
- 5.2 The performance in relation to the health of looked after children (health and dental checks) is 90% as at the end of October. We are in the process of funding an additional Looked After Children Nurse post.
- 5.3 CAMHS is working to provide a dedicated fast track service for looked after children as soon as possible. Although already providing a service to looked after children, this enhanced development will reduce waiting times and provide a more focused service, including consultation and advice for foster carers and adopters.

6. LACHES

- 6.1 LACHES is led by the Service Manager, Looked After Children's Life Chances. This post reports to the Head of Children's Services. It was established in July 2004 to provide effective leadership for the service. The current postholder is on a fixed contract and the post is now advertised.
- 6.2 The LACHES Co-ordinator undertakes the day-to-day co-ordination of the work of the team. The team comprises of three Case Workers, a Looked After Children's Nurse, one and a half Advisory Teachers and a Mentoring Co-ordinator. One full time Administrator supports the team.
- 6.3 Two events (19 and 26 November) have taken place to celebrate the educational achievement of looked after children in Barking & Dagenham. The Children's Champion together with the Directors of Social Services and DEAL presented certificates and awards to young people who achieved GCSEs this year. The Minister for Children attended the celebration event on 26 November. A young person made a short speech at the first event on the 19 November. At the request of the Children's Champion, and with the young person's consent, a copy is attached as an Appendix.

7. Additional Support

- 7.1 In order to deliver against our targets and improve overall performance promptly, we have engaged the voluntary sector project, Fresh Start. Their brief is to:
- help us understand what we could have done differently with the 2002 cohort
 - work with looked after children who did not sit their exams in 2004 and ensure they re-sit exams in June 2005
 - work with looked after children who will sit their exams in summer 2005
- 7.2 Fresh Start worked with young people recently who had achieved in exams so that we could learn from their experiences. Their findings are that education achievement depends on many aspects of the care experience. The number of

moves a young person has and the number of social workers appears to be significant as well as changes in school and additional support with studies. We are currently carrying out a research study to understand how we reduce the number of placement moves for looked after children. Our performance in this area continues to improve.

7.3 Fresh Start will be working alongside LACHES to provide services to support looked after children in education and training. They will oversee the quality of PEPs and provide support to Designated Teachers to ensure that PEP targets are smart and tailored to individual children. Fresh Start will assist in working with groups of young people within the identified cohorts described previously. Fresh Start will also be working with young people making the transition from Year 6 to Year 7.

8. Summary

8.1 The additional resources for LACHES agreed in June 2004 are funding a range of initiatives and incentives to encourage looked after children and young people to stay in education. These include:

- small payment for attendance at booster classes, homework clubs & completing course work on time
- provision of outdoor activity weekends to focus on personal development skills and raise self esteem
- awards for achieving GCSEs
- Individual tuition on a short term basis to support exams
- mentoring scheme for looked after children
- COOL DEAL Scheme
- additional staffing for LACHES
- the work of Fresh Start

Background Papers

- Executive Report 'Education of Looked After Children', 29 June 2004 (Minute 45)