

Progress report regarding the promises to children in care 2015-16

Promise 1 : 'To make sure you get the best care'

1. Children are involved in the Children in Care Council known as Skittlz and they attend the Corporate Parenting Group to put across their views and experience about being in care. This is an important gauge about services being provided and a source of ideas for improvement. They also carry out an annual 'appraisal' of the social work service received and a report is provided for this. The findings are brought to the Corporate Parenting Group and fed back to the service. As an example, business cards have been introduced in response to the appraisal of social workers and the children's request to have contact details of her/his allocated worker and who to contact when that worker is not available.
2. The Children in Care Council is supported by the Children's Rights Officer who also offers a service to support individual children. Arrangements have continued to provide support through the Independent Advocacy Service which is commissioned from Barnardos.
3. Each child in care has a social worker and the service has ensured that 100% of children and young people have an allocated social worker. All young people who are leaving care have a Personal Advisor.
4. Training is in place for carers and workers, including Total Respect training which is run by young people who have care experience and training for foster carers, to support their understanding of the issues for children in care and leaving care.
5. The policy for permanency which has been put in place includes the commitment to placing siblings together when placements are being made and when plans for longer term permanency are agreed. If there are issues about placing siblings then these are further assessed to ensure that plans are based on sound information and if necessary further expertise sought
6. There is a strong regard for arrangements for contact for children so that they are supported, where appropriate, to have contact with family and if not possible for this to be explained. The Contact service provide expertise in this important area of work. Arrangements for contact are checked regularly at the child in care review meetings.
7. As mentioned, each child and young person who is looked after will have regular child in care review meetings at which the plans and arrangements

are checked and altered to meet needs. Each child and young person therefore also has an allocated Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for this arrangement. As part of this the IRO seeks the views of the child or young person for the meeting. It is also important that the Social Worker, Carer and other professionals involved share good things which have happened for the child and the IRO and social worker have important roles to fulfil by ensuring that this is achieved for the child.

8. The frequency of the review meetings is monitored and performance reported with 93% of the reviews being completed within timescales. This is an improvement from 87% in 2014-15 and above London (91%), national (90%) and statistical neighbours (88%) for the 2014-15 period.

Promise 2 : ‘To look after you and treat you well’

9. Children’s Services has continued to experience changes in social work personnel and recognises the difficulties in this for supporting children in care and building the relationships with them which are so important. There is however greater stability in the workforce in the children in care and leaving care teams which is positive. The service as a whole continues to make strenuous efforts to recruit social workers and achieve the desired workforce stability.
10. Arrangements are in place through a dashboard of performance information to show the frequency of visits by social workers to children so that good standards are maintained and this is regularly monitored by managers. The visits recorded are regarded as a minimum and it is important to note that many children are visited at more frequent intervals depending on circumstances. There are two measures reported for visits to children in care:
 - a) Visits at a minimum frequency of 6 weeks to children for the first year of being in care. Performance for 2015-16 period was 66.5% compared with 84% in the previous year and is clearly identified as needing further attention
 - b) Visits at a minimum of 3 months for children in care and where plan is for long term care. Performance for 2015-16 period showed improvement at 91% compared with 89% in the previous year.
11. All children must have an up to date care plan throughout being in care. All young people who are leaving care should have a pathway plan which is put in place as they approach their 16th birthday. The plans are important as these set out the actions identified to meet the individual child and young person’s needs and impact on their outcomes. At the end of the 2015-16 period 94%

had a care plan recorded. Some children had been in care for less than 28 days and would not yet have a plan recorded. 91% of pathway plans for care leavers were up to date as at the end of the 2015-16 period.

12. The stability of placements is very important for children and is a good basis for achieving positive outcomes. There are two measures of placement stability which give information about the moves of placement over periods of time :

- a) Short Term placement stability (Former NI 62) - The % of children with three or more placements during the year, fell slightly from 13% (60/457 children) in 2014-2015 to 12% (50/418 children) in 2015- 2016. We are now in line with the London average, but above the Statistical Neighbours average (11%) and National average (10%).
- b) Long Term placement stability (Former NI 63) – the % of children in care for at least 2.5 years and in the same placement for the last two years, increased slightly from 59.1% in 2015 (81/137) to 59.9% (82/137) in 2015. However this area of performance is below all comparators – London 66%, SN 69% and National Average 68%. This is a key area of practice activity for action in the 2016-17 period with further attention to the matching of children with carers/placement and guidance for social workers about permanency planning.

13. Reference has been made to the challenges presented in achieving an adoptive placement for children. This is also reflected in the timescales involved where it has taken longer to match and place children in adoptive placements often because of the complexity of the children's needs such as disability, ethnicity or sibling groups. There are two measures about timescales for adoption:

- a) The average time between a child entering care and moving in with adoptive family has increased from 731 days in 2014-15 to 769 in 2015-16.
- b) The average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match has increased from 313 days in 2014-15 to 375 days in 2015-16.

Further analysis has been undertaken to understand this area of performance and actions are already in place

Promise 3 : 'To help you be healthy'

14. The Corporate Parenting Strategy recognises the importance of ensuring that children's health needs are addressed and this includes a number of health

related checks. There is a strong partnership arrangement in place with a range of health related service commissioners and providers.

15. There is close working with the designated Doctor and Nurse for Looked After Children. Children in care have initial health assessments within 28 days of admission to care and then review health assessments – every 6 months if child is under 5 and annually if child is over 5. It is important to note that whilst the aim is for all children to benefit from the range of health related checks some children choose not to attend for appointments arranged despite the efforts of those involved. Progress about the checks and any findings are discussed as part of the child's review meeting. Performance about health related checks has been positive with the great majority of children receiving checks :

a) There was an improvement in the number of children receiving medicals which increased from 75% to 82% for children over 2015-16 period

b) There was also improvement in the number of children who have been in care for over one year having up to date health checks – increased from 92% to 94%.

c) Up to date dental checks for children improved from 80% to 85%

d) The number of up to date eye checks for children reduced slightly from 77% to 75.5%

16. The health assessment and review work includes attention to immunisations and ensuring that these have happened and are up to date.

17. Children in care can receive support regarding advice, support and information about substance misuse through the Subwise service which is commissioned by the local authority.

18. Emotional wellbeing and health is a significant issue for many children in care due to their experiences prior to becoming looked after and adjusting to separation from their family. As part of the health assessments, emotional issues are identified as part of the Health Care Plans. Emotional wellbeing is monitored as part of the ongoing annual health checks and at LAC reviews.

19. There are arrangements in place for making a referral to CAMHS and providing a response through screening and an assessment within 28 days. Further work is planned for the coming year about CAMHS support for children in care.

20. Children and young people are encouraged and supported to be active, participate in hobbies, sport and interests which are appropriate to their abilities. Carers are expected to support this as part of their role and responsibilities. There are arrangements in place for allowances for children to do activities and children and young people have further support through leisure passes to the Borough's leisure centres.
21. A support group for children in care is held every Thursday where they can meet other children in care, have fun and be involved in various activities such as dance, music, art and video.

Promise 4 : 'To get the best education

22. The Virtual School is an essential service to support children and young people to achieve good outcomes through their education. This is done in a number of ways which include ensuring that children and young people in care have a place at a good nursery or school so that they have the best circumstances to achieve in their education.
23. Another important source of support provided through the Virtual School is to work with the school , designated teacher and social worker for each child and young person to have an up to date Personal Education Plan. By the end of the 2015-16 period a total of 90% of children in care had a Personal Education Plan which was in place and reviewed within the required 6 monthly timescale.
24. Additional funding can be accessed through the Pupil Premium Plus as part of the plan. Arrangements are in place for Education Healthcare Plans to support children and young people with complex needs.
25. The results of tests and exams for children and young people in care from 2015 are shown in the table below.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Rank /152	Quartile	Latest England Ave LAC
Children looked after Key Stage 2 - % Reading Level 4+	41.0	60.0	63.0	55.0	75.0	31	B	71.0
Children looked after Key Stage 2 - % Maths Level 4+	35.0	53.0	79.0	73.0	67.0	34	B	64.0
Children looked after Key Stage 2 - % Writing Level 4+	-	67.0	68.0	64.0	58.0	50	C	61.0
Children looked after Key Stage 2 - % Reading, Writing & Maths Level 4+	-	47.0	58.0	-	58.0	26	B	52.0
Children looked after Key Stage 2 - % Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling Level 4+	-	-	53.0	-	67.0	14	A	54.0
Children looked after GCSE - % 5+ A*-C	35.7	-	27.3	-	25.0	21	B	18.3
Children looked after GCSE - % 5+ A*-C inc. English & Maths	21.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	13.8

26. These show that the Key Stage 4 results from 2014-15 were above the all England and London results for looked after children. However the national result for 5 x A*-C stands at 64% so there is still a considerable gap that needs closing. The results are also in the top third of London boroughs for the children's Key Stage 2 results.. Grammar, punctuation and spelling is clearly a strength of our students. Writing appears to be the weakest area and the Virtual School will be liaising with our English Advisory colleagues to ensure that the borough's looked after children students are supported

27. The Virtual School service continues to use a range of approaches to support and improve children's education attainment and attendance. This includes commissioning a mentor for all in borough year 11 students; mentoring through the 'transformed you' service which is run by a former care leaver; purchasing licenses for the iCan Read programme to support reading at home for key stage 2 children; and use of the Beanstalk Project which uses volunteers to support primary schoolchildren

28. The service also takes action to address school attendance and monitor this with a view to making improvements. As at the end of March 2016, attendance in that spring term was

- 37% of students with 100% attendance (40% in previous term)
- 71% of students have 95-100% attendance (73% in previous term)
- 82% of students have 90-100% attendance (86% in previous term)

Attendance for children in care shows fluctuations and needs attention to make improvements. This will include a member of staff at the Virtual School taking lead responsibility regarding attendance.

29. The Council has recognised children and young people in care in its event to celebrate their achievements in November 2015 and which is a very positive experience for all involved. The awards cover a wide range of achievements including formal qualifications at school, college and university, apprenticeships, volunteering, participation in groups and giving back to the community.

Promise 5: ‘To be successful in life ‘

30. It is very important to involve children and young people and seek their views about important decisions which affect their lives. Arrangements continue to be in place to promote good practice so that social workers and independent reviewing officers listen to children and young people and take their views in to account when decisions are being taken and plans made.

31. There are a range of measures in place to support young people when leaving care and living independently. Training is in place for carers who can help young people to prepare for living independently. Young people receive a leaving care grant which is specifically tailored as for example to furnishing accommodation when moving to live independently. They are also given support with finding accommodation, including priority status for council provision. As at the end of the 2015-16 period there were 77% of young people who were care leavers and in suitable accommodation – this has reduced from 80% as at the end of 2014-15. It is important to bear in mind that the situation is affected by a number of factors including young people being in custody. We continue to be reliant on private rented market and landlords offering care and support packages to the Local Authority so that there are ‘move on’ plans from foster care and residential children’s homes.

32. There is a ‘staying put’ scheme in place which enables young people to continue to live with carers beyond the age of 18 and avoid a sudden cut off of the arrangements for their support and care. This recognises the more usual situation for young people in which they continue to live at home after the age of 18 and beyond.

33. The council provides a scheme for savings for children and young people in care which they can access when they leave care. This is in addition to the

leaving care grant which is more. Guidance and support is provided about the use of the savings and the leaving care grant by staff in the service and working with the young person.

34. The Corporate Parenting Strategy includes actions to support young people to get in to work through continuing their education, training or finding a job. There is a council wide Employment, Education and Training (EET) strategy in place. Individual pathway plans for young people identify actions tailored to the young person's individual needs which can support and assist them in to opportunities for education, training or work. Work takes place within the Council and with key partners such as the Job Centres and Careers Advice Services.
35. The performance regarding employment, education and training of young people aged 16-21 is monitored and at the end of 2015-16 was 50%. This is a decrease from 54% as at the end 2014-15. This is below the London average of 53% for the 2014-15 period but above the national average of 48% and statistical neighbours average of 48% for that period.
36. In the period of 2015-16 there were 22 young people attending university.