

<i>item:</i>	6
<i>report:</i>	CYP45/09

## **IMPROVING SERVICES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN – AN ACTION PLAN by Bill Alexander**

### **Summary**

This report provides an opportunity to review the outcome of the Corporate Parenting Seminar held on 30 October 2009, including the looked after children action plan and the Scottish Government Letter to NHS Chief Executives.

### **1. Corporate Parenting**

- 1.1 The Highland Council and NHS Highland have pledged in the Single Outcome Agreement to give a high priority to their corporate parenting responsibilities, including educational attainment; transition to work; further and higher education and training; support at home; more family placements and fewer children living outwith the Highlands.
- 1.2 Corporate parenting involves the demonstration of ownership and leadership at a senior level, including members. Elected members have a specific role to play in ensuring that the outcomes and life chances of looked after children and young people are maximised. Other agencies have a responsibility to provide support, as the 'extended corporate family'.
- 1.3 Being a good corporate parent includes:
  - Accepting responsibility for all children in the Council's care
  - Making their needs a priority, and ensuring support for their care and education
  - Seeking the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own child
  - Listening to the views of children and young people and taking account of them
  - Considering the impact on children of any new policy
  - Respecting diversity
  - Giving young people the support they need as they move into adulthood.

### **2. Corporate Parenting Seminar**

- 2.1 The Highland Council and NHS Highland held a joint corporate parenting seminar on 30 October 2009.

- 2.2 This seminar considered a number of presentations by Chief Officers and *Who Cares? Scotland*, as well as video material. It also involved an extended discussion, where members committed to the corporate parenting role, and raised a number of issues, including:
- The appreciation of established services in Highland, but the need to continually improve.
  - The particular value of good foster care and good kinship care.
  - The critical importance of good health outcomes and good educational outcomes.
  - The importance and the challenge of being a 'pushy parent'
  - The need to main continuity for looked after children when they are placed outwith the authority.
  - The value of social networks.

### **3. Looked after Children Services Action Plan**

- 3.1 The Seminar was presented with a proposed looked after children action plan, which will be included in *For Highland's Children 3*.
- 3.2 Further to the discussion at the seminar, some enhancements are proposed to the action plan. It is also proposed that it is separated into Improvement Objectives and Targets
- 3.3 The Improvement Objectives are structured against the FHC3 wellbeing indicators, confirming that we want our looked after children to be safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected & responsible and included.

#### IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES

##### Safe

- Ensure looked after and accommodated children have the confidence to report bullying.
- Improve management and responses to challenging behaviour.

##### Healthy

- Ensure all looked after children have a robust, reviewable health plan, which shows how health needs will be met.

##### Achieving

- Update guidance on the education of looked after children.
- Ensure that achievement is addressed in all looked after children's plans.
- Consolidate the present level of dedicated support for the education of looked after children.

##### Nurtured

- Sustain the implementation of enhanced assessment, planning, action and review processes as part of GIRFEC.
- Continue to develop alternatives to out of authority placements.
- Ensure the quality of foster care.
- Ensure the quality of residential care.
- Consolidate the kinship care support service.
- Implement the local adoption plan.
- Secure permanence and stability for more children, and earlier.
- Trial a social network for care leavers.

### Active

- Ensure looked after children encouraged to develop personal interests and hobbies.

### Respected & Responsible

- Ensure looked after children's views are taken account of in policy and service planning.
- Implement an employment training scheme for looked after children.

### Included

- Ensure services respect and reflect diversity.
- Establish a one-stop Children's Rights Service for Looked after Children.

## TARGETS

- Shift the balance of care, from residential and foster care to kinship.
- Increase the proportion of looked after children at home
- Reduce the length of time that children are accommodated.
- Fewer looked after children in out of authority placements.
- Fewer placement moves for looked after children.
- Improve the educational outcomes for looked after children across all indicators
- All Child's Plans include and take account of young people's views
- Increase the number of children in permanent placements, and reduce time taken to secure this.
- Increase the number of care leavers in education, training or employment
- Increase the number of children moving into supported housing arrangements

## **4. Scottish Government Letter to NHS Chief Executives**

- 4.1 The recent Scottish Government Letter to NHS Chief Executives regarding looked after children (CEL 16/2009) was reported to a recent meeting of the Committee, and referred to at the corporate parenting seminar. The Committee requested further information about implementation plans.
- 4.2 The letter requires that NHS Boards nominate a Board Director who will take a corporate responsibility for looked after children. In NHS Highland, this is the Director of Community Care.
- 4.3 The letter also requires that measures are put in place to ensure:
  - NHS Boards fulfil their statutory responsibilities
  - The implementation of 'We Can and Must do Better'
  - Every looked after child is offered a health assessment by 2010

- Every looked after child is offered a mental health assessment (in line with mental health strategy) by 2015
  - Each looked after child, who has their need assessed has their health care plan co-ordinated appropriately
  - Performance in respect of health assessments and outcomes is measured.
- 4.4 As reported to the Committee and at the seminar, we are well placed with regard to all of these actions in terms of children who are accommodated in residential, foster and kinship care settings – where all have had their needs assessed, and taken account of in the Child’s Plan.
- 4.5 The action plan would further commit us to the dedicated assessment, planning and review of the health needs of children who are looked after at home. It is likely that this would involve additional dedicated infrastructure support, and it is proposed that this is scoped further as part of the looked after children action plan.
- 4.6 The seminar also expressed concern about the need for continuity of health care for young people who are accommodated outwith the authority. Many of these young people will have significant health needs, and particularly mental health needs. However, it is extremely difficult for clinicians in Highland to maintain regular contact with them, and to ensure continuity in their treatment.
- 4.7 While some residential schools purchase their own health provision, this is unlikely to replicate the breadth of service available to NHS Highland. Moreover, the majority of schools do not have such capacity. Accordingly, most young people are dependent on the local Health Board of each School to respond to their needs, and it was reported that the response from other NHS Boards is variable.
- 4.8 It was suggested that there are some parallels here with the guidance given by the Government in CEL 3/2009 regarding the Armed Forces and their families, which promotes “continuity of public services wherever they are based and whenever they are obliged to move.” Members committed to lobby Government with regard to this matter.

## **Recommendation**

The Joint Committee is invited to review the outcome of the Corporate Parenting Seminar, and asked to agree the looked after children action plan, and that the Committee ensures robust scrutiny and governance of this plan as part of its corporate parenting responsibilities.

**Bill Alexander**  
Head of Children's Services