

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	18 January 2007
Subject:	Children Looked After – Scrutiny report and response to Government Green Paper
Key Decision:	No
(Executive-side only)	
Responsible Officer:	Paul Clark – Director of Children’s Services
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Janet Mote
Exempt:	Public
Enclosures:	Appendix A: Mike Stein writing in the Guardian, December 6 2006 Appendix B – Report considered by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee Appendix C – Reference from the Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee

SECTION 1 – SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Cabinet is requested to consider the recommendations of scrutiny, the responses of the consultation to the Green Paper and endorse the scrutiny proposals and agree the Portfolio holder response to the consultation.

Purpose

This report informs cabinet of the work of Children’s Scrutiny Panel, the views of young people and officers regarding the Green Paper on Children Looked After and summarises Harrow’s position on these matters.

SECTION 2 - REPORT

Introduction

This report provides a brief outline of the Government's Green Paper Care Matters – Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care.

Published October 2006

It also links the work of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny sub committee, the Light Touch Review of the Education of Children Looked After published September 2006 and included 2 consultation events held in Harrow to consider and inform our response to the Green Paper.

1. Participation Officers and Children Looked After had a consultation event on the 30th November
2. A multi-agency consultation event involving members, officers, carers, young people, headteachers, police officers and health colleagues was held on the 11th December see

Background

The green paper sets out proposals for actions by a range of agencies and staff to improve the life chances and outcomes for Children Looked After. Over the last few years the achievements, attainments and Life Chances gaps between Children Looked After and rest of the population has been cause for serious concern. The proposals outlined in the Green Paper seek to improve the manner in which the existing services are delivered to this vulnerable group. They propose a range of options for authorities and other agencies to consider and comment on.

The Light Touch Scrutiny considered our services to Children Looked After with regard to educational attainment and achievement. The consultation events focussed mostly upon the proposals in the Green Paper but gave an opportunity for Carers, staff and Councillors and young people to comment on the general principles, activity and outcome that services to Children Looked After should deliver.

The failure of the National system to deliver good outcomes for Children Looked After is rather exaggerated. Many young people come to the Care System from difficult, disruptive and debilitating family backgrounds, it is not possible for a year or two stay in a good foster home or residential unit to balance out the years of difficulties and deprivation that the young person has suffered. However it is fair to say that the Looked After Children system has had and continues to have a number of successes for children. Indeed many children looked after go on to live happy and successful lives. Appendix A is a recent article by Professor Mike Stein setting out the concerns with the green paper argument and also making clear the successes of children looked after across the country.

The bulk of this report sets out in summary the proposals of the green paper, the recommendations of scrutiny group and the commentary of the consultation events together with an update on Harrow's work in this area.

Green Paper on Children Looked After (Government Summary with linked scrutiny and consultation response)

1) The case for reform

Chapter 1 sets out the statistics on the education of children in care. Few children in care attained 5 good GCSEs in 2005 compared with all children, and similar performance gaps exist at all ages both before and after Key Stage 4.

A lot of progress has been made for children over the last decade. There has been an increase of eleven percentage points in the proportion of all young people gaining 5 A*-C GCSEs, and the proportion of young people in education, employment or training by 19 now stands at 87% – the highest it has ever been.

There have also been a range of steps to address directly the problems experienced by children in care, and progress has been made through a number of reforms including:

- Quality Protects in 1998;
- The Care Standards Act 2000;
- The Prime Minister's adoption initiative;
- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000;
- The Social Exclusion Unit 2003 report on the Education of Children in Care; and
- The duty in the Children Act 2004 for local authorities to promote the education of children in care.

The outcomes of the 60,000 children in care at any one time have improved in recent years: the proportion gaining 5 A*-C GCSEs has risen from 7% in 2000 to 11% in 2005 and the proportion known to be participating in education, employment or training at age 19 has increased by 8% since 2002, when the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 came into effect. But it is clear that they are not improving at the same rate as those of all children.

Children in care are a group who are especially deserving of our help precisely because they are in care. As their corporate parent the State cannot and must not accept any less for them than we would for our own children.

2) Children on the edge of care

While most of the proposals in this Green Paper are aimed at children who are already in the care of the local authority, it is important also to recognise that many children come in and out of care in a short space of time, and several spend more than one period in care. Chapter 2 looks at the sorts of interventions which can help to prevent children needing to come into care in the first place, and to resettle them with their families after being in care where that is the best option for the child.

This means – in line with reforms of children's services through the Every Child Matters programme – identifying problems early and responding to them quickly by offering sustained, multi-disciplinary support.

Proposals include:

- New research on identifying and responding to neglect;
- Testing out a model of intensive whole family therapy which aims to keep families together where possible;

- Improving the links between adults' and children's services in order to ensure that professionals working with either group see the family as a whole; and
- Creating a Centre of Excellence for Children's and Families Services in order to identify and spread evidence-based solutions to the problems experienced by families whose children are on the edge of care.

Chapter 2 also launches a national debate on the future of care. The Green Paper will explore who care is for, whether there are any groups of children for whom care is not an appropriate response, and what the population of children in care should look like in the future.

Work already under way in Harrow

- Harrow has produced a "Research Handbook for Social Workers", and are working on a follow-up that focuses on the latest evidence around neglect.
- Harrow has recently carried out a full review of family support services across the borough. The development of nine Children's Centres in Harrow will provide a range of flexible family support services at the point of need and in the child's locality. There will be new targeted and specialised family support services in social care, with a phased integration beginning in November. This will all be based strongly on the benefits of early intervention.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee recommendations

- Information that can identify children who are at risk of being taken into care should be given special attention and monitored regularly with the aim of this Council supporting these children and their families through preventative work. As this covers a spectrum of issues across children's services, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee should consider this matter for its future work programme.

Harrow consultation event comments

- We welcome the support for Family Group Conferences, particularly on children on the verge of care.
- However, further detail would be welcome in relation to early intervention and exploration of how the Government can invest in preventative work.
- Identifying the causes of neglect may be better served through drawing on existing research rather than commissioning new research into this area.
- Disseminating best practice is critical. However, a new centre may not necessarily be the best route.
- Harrow has developed work based seminars and discussions to support evidence based practice.
- We would welcome nationally led briefings to support practice in this respect.
- Consideration can be given to the use of aide memoirs as work is recorded and planned by way of the integrated Children System.

3) The role of the corporate parent

Children have told the government that the lack of a consistent adult in their lives is a major and harmful feature of being in care. Chapter 3 sets out in detail how the corporate parenting role should be carried out in order to address this gap.

Proposals include:

- Exploring the feasibility of piloting new independent ‘social care practices’, small independent groups of social workers who contract with the local authority to provide services to children in care;
- Piloting the use of individual budgets for each child in care to be held by their lead professional – the social worker;
- Clarity over the role and use of care plans; and
- A revitalisation of the independent visitor scheme in order to provide ‘independent advocates’ for children in care.

Work already under way in Harrow

- Care plans are scrutinised at both the Child Care and Permanency Tracking Panels. Harrow has a very good record of Children Looked After participating at their reviews. The Independent Reviewing Officers monitor the effectiveness of the Care Plans and ensure that the views of Children Looked After are considered through the reviewing process.
- Harrow is well placed to meet lead professional and social worker requirements, with a very good performance history of allocating a qualified social worker to all Children Looked After.
- The Harrow Corporate Parenting Group was established in its current format in 2002. However, as this was an unconstituted body with no advisory function, Elected Members were of the view that the establishment of a Corporate Parenting Panel as an advisory panel would publicly demonstrate the Council’s commitment to fulfil its Corporate Parenting role. It would also place the Panel formally on the Executive side, and differentiate it clearly from the Scrutiny function.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee recommendations

- That each political group ensures that every member of its group attends at least one LAC event per year to ensure they remain in touch with looked after children and young people and in fulfilling their responsibilities as corporate parents.
- That the Member Development Panel organises a seminar on corporate parenting for the current intake of councillors, and considers the valuable input that the Corporate Parenting Group can play in this training.

Harrow consultation event comments

- The inspection of CLA education should not increase the burden on councils.
- A move to an “independent practice” would create an additional move for the child.
- In addition, the logistics involved and how case accountability can be maintained may prohibit a move to an “independent practice”.
- Evidence does not support the view that independent agencies are more able to recruit and retain permanent staff.
- We would welcome further analysis around how social care staff in particular can be attracted to permanent positions within Local Authorities to offset competition from Independent Agencies.
- We do question how the budget holding lead professional model can deal with issues of

4) Better placements

Evidence shows that frequent moves between care placements have a drastic effect on the ability of children and young people to succeed both in education and in other areas of their lives. Currently children in care are moved between placements far too frequently.

Chapter 4 sets out proposals radically to reform the placements system, improving the number and quality of foster carers and ensuring that children are only placed in residential children's homes which meet high standards of care.

Proposals include:

- Introducing a tiered framework of placements to respond to different levels of need, underpinned by a new qualifications framework, fee structure and national minimum standards;
- Piloting for younger children the use of intensive foster care with multi-agency support;
- Improving the recruitment of foster carers through specially-tailored recruitment campaigns;
- Extending the use of specialist foster care for children with complex needs; and
- Introducing new regional commissioning units to secure better value for money and introduce placement choice for children.

Work already under way in Harrow

- Harrow has always acknowledged choice as a key factor in placement stability, with placement officers scoping a wide range of alternatives for each child. Harrow is in the process of building up its range of in house fostering provision to meet the needs of CLA, which will sit alongside our in house residential units and range of independent providers to ensure the best alternatives for every Harrow child.
- Out-of-authority placements are tightly managed at Group Manager level, and are only ever used if capacity does not exist locally. We are also reviewing all current out-of-authority placements to determine whether they meet the child's long term care needs.
- Harrow has engaged the services of an independent PR company and a foster care recruitment campaign is well underway.

Harrow consultation event comments

- Green Paper proposals and guidance to address the shortfall of places would be welcomed.
- We would welcome further guidance on how to develop the remit of regional initiatives such as the London Consortium in order to recruit and retain a high quality pool of local carers.
- We would welcome greater emphasis on meeting the needs of Children with Disabilities.
- We would welcome greater consideration around how best to review the needs of children who are in 52 week residential schools as well as those children who are living away from home for long periods.
- It is anticipated that there will be a resource issue, but it is important that this cohort is reviewed independently of line management.

5) A first class education

While the experiences they have in their placement are critical to children in care, the school environment and the way in which teachers and other school staff work with them are also vital to their chances of success. But many children in care currently have a poor

experience of school: they tend to be in lower performing schools, be moved round between schools too often, and receive insufficient support within school to flourish.

Chapter 5 sets out how the government will work with local authorities as corporate parents and with schools to secure the very best education for these children. Every child in care should be in a good school, and be given the support they need to make the most of being in that school. The government is committed to ensure that children in care also fare well in the further education system.

Proposals include:

- A 'virtual headteacher' in every local area responsible for driving up the performance of schools in relation to children in care;
- Providing local authorities with the power to direct schools to admit children in care, even where the school is fully subscribed;
- An enhanced entitlement to free school transport to ensure that where children do move placement they do not necessarily also need to change school;
- Better support in school to prevent exclusions of children in care; and
- A dedicated budget for each social worker to spend on improving the educational experience of every child in care.

Work already under way in Harrow

- Although there is currently no formal policy to place Children Looked After in the very best schools, Harrow is fortunate that so many of its schools are classified as top performing. Indeed, a recent evaluation from the Gatsby project showed that even where children are not in the very best, they are still receiving very good pastoral support – at times better than those in the top schools.
- Harrow has produced a "Compact" to reduce the rate of exclusions, particularly amongst vulnerable groups, signed by representatives of the Council, PCT, Police, Councillors, Head Teachers and Governors. This has been very successful.
- The Project Manager of the Gatsby Project has performed a similar role to that of "virtual headteacher" in Harrow for several years – the introduction of a formal role would empower this work further. Proposals for the nomination to the post are in hand.
- Under the Local Public Service Agreement of 2004, a range of initiatives were carried out, including the payment of bursaries to Harrow schools to support Children Looked After.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee recommendations

- That the list of all teachers and governors in the borough with designated responsibilities for LAC within their schools includes details of peers who can be contacted to share advice and experience. This development is practical, feasible and affordable and could tie in with the training already provided to support these roles.

Harrow consultation event comments

- Directing schools to take a child in care are helpful, but guidance is essential to support both the school and the child to ensure a successful transition and to deal with problems in order to minimise the risk of exclusions.
- We would welcome consideration to schools being included under Section 52 of the Children Act 2004 "statutory guidance on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of children in care"
- The proposed £500 per year grant to each child in care must be new money, not a diversion of the child's mainstream support in school through standard DSG.
- The creation of a virtual headteacher is a helpful development but must be costed as is the provision of free school transport.

6) Life outside school

The Green Paper is not only about the part which education and social services have to play in improving the lives of children and young people. It is truly a cross-Government agenda. Taking as its starting point the aim of securing for children in care the kind of happy, fulfilled childhood which we would want for our own children, the Green Paper also has a range of proposals for ensuring that children in care access all the other types of positive activities and support which children generally tend to enjoy.

Proposals include:

- Encouraging local authorities to provide free access for children in care to all their facilities including leisure centres, sports grounds and youth clubs;
- A new model of comprehensive health provision for each child in care;
- Better training for a range of professionals including paediatricians on how to work with children in care;
- Improved access for children in care and their foster parents to Children's Centre provision;
- Enhanced opportunities for them to participate in stimulating and rewarding personal development activities and volunteering.

Work already under way in Harrow

- Harrow has produced a "Resource Directory" for all parents in the borough, hard copies of which have been sent to all foster carers. This sets out a variety of support and activities available for young people in Harrow.
- Harrow has a concessionary leisure pass for Children Looked After and foster carers' own children to use the leisure centre and Bannisters Sports Centre. The library service have also removed penalties for overdue books borrowed by Children Looked After and foster carers' own children. Harrow has also run a variety of free pilot sport and leisure events for Children Looked After, including dance and trampolining projects.
- Children and young people in care have opportunities to participate in a range of artistic and cultural activities. Indeed, the "Journey Around My World" project was highlighted in the Green Paper as an example of best practice and, together with the "All Change for Harrow", was shortlisted for the national Children and Young People's Services awards.
- Harrow has a designated nurse for Children Looked After in post.
- 82.1% of Children Looked After have up to date health assessments and 86.9% have up to date dental checks.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee recommendations

- That this authority continues rewarding LAC for their achievements and that the views of LAC are sought in exploring the best ways to celebrate these successes in an awards ceremony – whether an inclusive event for all children and young people or an event especially for LAC. The Review Group recommends that following this consultation a costed proposal is developed on the options for such an event, including details on funding options (e.g. corporate sponsorship). Work on Youth Achievement Award ceremony is underway.

Harrow consultation event comments

- We would welcome further guidance around how the different agencies can cooperate to ensure robust allocation of resources to meet all the health needs of children are looked after.
- We would welcome guidance on how best to meet the health needs, and in particular, the mental health needs of children looked after who are in transience or placed in other LAs,
- The provision of free access to leisure and other facilities for children in care are welcomed but will have to be costed.
- "Soft targets" can be encouraged within the Health Plan of each child looked after, which are owned by relevant professionals and the child.

7) The transition to adult life

We know that the long-term outcomes of many people who were in care as children are distressing: care leavers are overrepresented in some of our most vulnerable groups of adults including young parents, prisoners, and the homeless. They are also under-represented in further and higher education, and the proportion of young people leaving care aged 19 without any form of purposeful activity such as employment, training or education is much higher than that of their peers.

This Green Paper signals a turning point in the way young people in care are treated as they grow older. The government wants to abandon a system where young people are forced to leave care as early as age 16. They want an approach which continues to support them as long as they need it, which ceases to talk about 'leaving care' and instead ensures that young people move on in a gradual, phased and above all prepared way.

Proposals include:

- Piloting a veto for young people over any decisions about moving on from care before they turn 18;
- Piloting allowing young people to continue to live with foster carers up to the age of 21, receiving the support they need to continue in education;
- Providing a top-up to the Child Trust Funds of young people in care;
- Creating more supported accommodation for young people; and
- Introducing a national bursary for young people in care going to university.

Work underway in Harrow

- Young people "Leaving Care" can remain with their foster carers.

Harrow consultation event comments

- Allowing young people to remain with their foster families up until the age of 21 is an ideal, which needs to be considered if children looked after are to be treated as "our own". However, there are substantial resources associated with proposals for a veto around leaving care and extending foster care up to 21.
- Similarly, a top up of the child trust fund and the national bursary are commendable, but Local Authorities cannot bear the brunt of the cost.
- Children looked after do not have the same "back up" as other children going to university. Consideration is important around grants rather than loans and on going support from a named professional.

8) Making the system work

The government is confident that the proposals set out in this Green Paper will deliver a step change in the outcomes of children in care. But as the corporate parent of children in care, we cannot rely on expectations alone: we need to take decisive action in instances of failure. Chapter 8 sets out a new accountability framework which works with the grain of the forthcoming Local Government White Paper to ensure that failure for this group of vulnerable children is identified and addressed.

Proposals include:

- Asking Ofsted to carry out a regular inspection of how each local authority is meeting the educational needs of children in care;

- Introducing an annual national stock-take by Ministers of the progress of children in care;
- Expecting every local authority to set up a 'children in care council';
- Making Independent Reviewing Officers more independent; and
- Making the education of children in care one of the DfES's key national priorities for local government.

Work already under way in Harrow

- Harrow has an established "Young Voices" group for Children Looked After to influence decisions relevant to their care. This group have attended Corporate Parenting Meetings with Members, and also formed part of a group of young people who presented the Young People's Participation Strategy to Cabinet.
- Children Looked After, together with other children and young people, are also given the opportunity to affect wider decision making through participating in "APSIG" events with senior Councillors and Council decision makers.

Harrow consultation event comments

- The proposals for local authorities intervening around the poor performance of schools for children in care will be welcomed if it results in closer cooperation and strategies for improving the outcomes of all children, including children looked after.
- The review of the role and independence of the Independent Reviewing Officer will be welcomed.
- However, it is important to consider how the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer can be strengthened within the present arrangements in the first instance.
- The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer should be considered in relation to the role of the Independent Advocate to ensure that the roles complement each other and ultimately "champion" the needs of the child.

Recommendations

- Cabinet endorse the proposals of the Children and Young Person's Scrutiny sub committee however bearing in mind the extensive workload of councilors, Cabinet is recommended to encourage rather than ensure "members of each political group to attend Looked After Children Events" (recommendation 3)
- Cabinet authorize the Portfolio holder to respond to the Green paper in line with the scrutiny and consultation responses.

Equalities Impact Consideration

The proposals from scrutiny will assist all Harrow's diverse groups in improving their achievement if they become looked after.

The consultation group included children and young people representative of the borough's diverse population.

Financial considerations

The scrutiny proposals can be delivered within existing resources. The response to the Green paper will make plain the need for adequate funding.

Legal considerations

The proposals do not require any legal advice to implement.

Section 17 Crime and Disorder Act Considerations

The scrutiny proposals will support our work to reduce offending.

SECTION 3 - STATUTORY OFFICER CLEARANCE

Chief Finance Officer	<input type="checkbox"/>	Name: ...Paula Foulds.....
		Date: 20.12.06.....
Monitoring Officer	<input type="checkbox"/>	Name: ...Helen White.....
		Date:21.12.06.....

Contact: Paul Clark, Director of Children's Services, tel 020 8424 1356

Background Papers:

Green Paper – Care Matters

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers should telephone 020 8424 1356

IF APPROPRIATE, does the report include the following considerations?

1.	Consultation	YES
2.	Corporate Priorities	YES
3.	Manifesto Pledge Reference Number	E – Empowering Harrow Youtn

Appendix A: Mike Stein writing in the Guardian, December 6 2006

Wrong turn

The consensus that children in care are failing, and that the system is to blame, is plain wrong

Mike Stein

Wednesday December 6, 2006

[The Guardian](#)

In his foreword to the government green paper, Care Matters, the education and skills secretary, Alan Johnson, refers to the "insecurity, ill health, lack of fulfilment", as well as the educational underachievement, of many of the 60,000 children who are in care. The week before the publication of the green paper, a Centre for Policy Studies report talked about how we are "betraying 60,000 children in care", claiming that "a successful system of care would transform this country, empty a third of our prisons, and halve the number of prostitutes and homeless". And in response to Care Matters, chiefs of local authority and voluntary childcare organisations have been queuing up to endorse the failures of state care.

But the political and professional consensus that the care system is to blame for society's woes is wrong, for five reasons.

First, many of these 60,000 young people come into care for a few weeks or months and return to their parents; 40% return home within six months, a majority within 12 months, and the average length of stay for all young people in care is less than 2.5 years. Their time spent in care represents a very small part of their lives and therefore in no scientific sense could it be causally linked to future outcomes. The education, careers, health and wellbeing of these young people will be far more shaped by what happens to them at home and in their schools and communities. To make a retrospective connection between, for example, a week spent in care as a baby and ending up in prison or homeless is a gross distortion that devalues and stigmatises young people who live in care and those who care for them.

Second, it is only about 10% of the 60,000 who leave care at between 16 and 18 years of age. But among this group most come into care, aged 10 to 15, from very poor economic circumstances and difficult family backgrounds: neglect, poor parenting, or physical, emotional or sexual abuse has often been part of their lives. These circumstances cast a long shadow on their emotional and intellectual development and most have very disrupted educational careers before coming into care. When they enter care, some as late as 13 to 15 years of age, their educational attainment levels are often well behind those of same age young people in the general population. Again, any association between care and outcomes will be flawed unless it recognises the impact of their pre-care experiences.

Third, research studies we have carried out at York University during the last 25 years show that despite their very poor starting points, some care leavers will successfully "move on" from care and achieve fulfilment in their personal lives and careers, while a second group will "survive" quite well, given assistance from skilled leaving-care workers. This leaves a third, highly vulnerable group of young people who have a range of complex mental health needs and will require assistance into and during adulthood.

It is this latter group, representing about 3%-5% of the 60,000 care population, who have become identified in the public and professional consciousness as typical of all young people in the care system, and who are driving the reform agenda.

Improving outcomes

Our research studies at York University do show that these three different pathways are associated with young people's family life, the quality of care they experience, their transitions from care, and the support they receive after care. Improving outcomes requires early interventions and family support; providing better quality care to compensate young people for their damaging pre-care experiences through stability, continuity, as well as assistance to overcome educational deficits; providing more gradual transitions from care to adulthood, and ongoing support, especially to those young people with mental health and complex needs.

Fourth, there is evidence from international research that outcomes get better when young people get older and settle into adulthood, especially those who have had stability and skilled help. After all, youth transitions are by definition a time of change and some disruption.

Fifth, it is unlikely the proposals contained within Care Matters will have any significant impact on outcomes if current measures are used as the only indicator of progress. These outcome measures are crude in three respects: they detach young people in care from their socio-economic backgrounds - the differences in educational attainment are far less when comparisons are made between care leavers and young people from similar backgrounds, and some young people from care do better by being in care, which is not recognised; and they fail to take into account young people's "starting points" on entry to care and the progress they have made in care - again, major achievements in getting back into education, developing leisure interests and vocational skills or becoming a parent, which may improve their self-esteem, often go unacknowledged. They also focus primarily on educational attainment and careers, and separate these from other inter-related dimensions of young people's lives, most importantly their wellbeing.

What is needed is a progress measure to provide a far more rounded view of what is happening to young people at different points in time that could incorporate their views of their wellbeing, as well as that of other important people in their lives. This would recognise their hazardous journey, as well as the efforts of those who have helped them.

In one of our York studies, using such a composite measure of progress, we found that three-quarters of young people leaving care were making progress towards, or had achieved, positive outcomes.

The simplistic view of care as failing 60,000 young people should be confined to the dustbin. Until we introduce a more sophisticated measure of progress we do not know how successful care is - although the indications from research findings in relation to young people who spend longer in care (and therefore care can be said to have some impact on their lives) is far more positive than generally recognised. But care could be better. Just to "survive" or "struggle" with complex needs is not good enough.

The proposals in Care Matters that build on the body of established research findings detailed above are to be welcomed, especially those designed to improve the status, rewards and training of carers, in order to improve stability, quality of care and more gradual transitions from care. But these need to be seen as part of a more comprehensive

response across the life-course of young people, including measures to tackle family problems, social deprivation and poor quality education. Care cannot by itself carry the can.

*· Mike Stein is research professor at York University's social work research and development unit. His book *What Works for Young People Leaving Care?* is available from Barnardo's Books at barnardos.org.uk*