



CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE 2006/07

LIGHT TOUCH REVIEW OF THE EDUCATION OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN September 2006

REVIEW GROUP:

Councillor Mark Versallion – Review Group Chairman

Councillor Margaret Davine

Councillor Mitzi Green

Councillor Narinder Mudhar

Councillor Sasikala Suresh

Councillor Jeremy Zeid

Mr Alton Bell – Association of Harrow Governing Bodies

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

The aim of this committee's scrutiny of the education of Looked After Children is to identify ways in which Harrow Council can improve educational attainment whilst also promoting the better understanding of Members' roles and responsibilities as corporate parents.

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee conducted a Light Touch Review from July to September 2006. This review had limited time and resource and so focused its attention on specific areas to ensure value-added recommendations, of which there are five.

Further work in this area would be of benefit to both Looked After Children and Harrow Council's policy development and service delivery. This review provides a good foundation for future investigations.

I would like to thank all the officers and members who participated in this review and my particular thanks to Mr Alton Bell, who represented the Association of Harrow Governing Bodies and who is also a foster carer. I very much appreciate everyone's time and commitment in supporting this committee's work and its recommendations.

Councillor Mark Versallion
Chairman
Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Section 52 of the Children Act 2004 places a duty on the local authority in its role as corporate parent to promote the educational achievement of looked after children.

At its meeting in June 2006, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee commissioned a light touch review of the education of looked after children in Harrow's care, to report back to its next meeting in October.

The scope of the review examined the way in which the council and its members fulfil the role of corporate parents and in doing so, promoted better understanding of the roles and responsibilities as well as assessing the adequacy of services to looked after children.

Following an initial meeting to set its terms of reference, the Review Group conducted much of its evidence gathering and analysis in an 'online' fashion, culminating in a 'Question and Answer Session' with the People First Portfolio Holder and the Director of Children's Services.

The Review Group makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: 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 the 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 inclusion in its future work programme.

Recommendation 2: 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 budgeted proposal is developed on the options for such an event, including details on funding options e.g. corporate sponsorship.

Recommendation 3: The Corporate Parenting Group ensures that every member of the Council attends as many as possible LAC events per year to ensure they remain in touch with looked after children and young people and fulfil their responsibilities as corporate parents.

Recommendation 4: 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.

Recommendation 5: 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.

BACKGROUND: NATIONAL CONTEXT

Definitions

A 'looked after child' is a child or young person who is living away from home in a setting arranged and supported by the local authority either voluntarily (under s20 of the Children Act 1989¹) or as a result of court proceedings and a care order. They can be of any age from birth to 18 years. Furthermore if they were in care at or after their 16th birthday ('care leavers') the local authority retains the responsibility for them 'as a good parent' until they are 25 years old.

'Corporate parent' refers to the role local authorities have with regard to the children and young people in their care, whereby they are responsible for all aspects of their welfare as if they were a parent.

As education spans more than that received just during school, the duty to promote educational achievement includes under 5's and those leaving care and going on to education, employment or training. Likewise, achievement goes beyond academic achievement as it is recognised that there are many other ways to demonstrate an ability to achieve.

The national picture

Over 61,000 children and young people are looked after at any one time in England². Each year about 90,000 are looked after, 42% of whom return home within six months. A number of studies have concluded that children and young people who are looked after still face serious challenges in their lives and are often disadvantaged as a result, in particular educationally.

In a study published in 2003³, the Social Exclusion Unit identified a range of barriers that prevent looked after children and young people from achieving their educational potential. These included placement instability, time out of school or other learning settings, insufficient help with their education if they get behind, insufficient support and encouragement at home and not enough help with emotional, physical or mental health and wellbeing.

Over the last few years, children's services have increasingly come under the spotlight, not least as a response to the Victoria Climbié Inquiry⁴. This has led to the Every Child Matters Green Paper⁵, the Children Act 2004⁶ and the Change for Children Programme⁷, which sets out the agenda for change to achieve the objectives of Every Child Matters.

¹ *The Children Act 1989*, HMSO 1989. This Act gives the basic framework which provides the legal underpinning for all services for children, in particular children and young people in need or in public care.

² *Children Looked After in England*, DfES 2005.

³ *A Better Education for Children in Care*, Social Exclusion Report, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, September 2003.

⁴ Report of an Inquiry by Lord Laming, Department of Health and Home Office, January 2003.

⁵ *Every Child Matters* – Green Paper presented to Parliament, Treasury September 2003.

⁶ *The Children Act 2004*, HMSO 2004. This provides the legal underpinning for *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* – a series of documents that have been published to provide guidance under the Act, to support local authorities and their partners in implementing new statutory duties.

⁷ *Every Child Matters – Change for Children Programme*, DfES 2004.

*Every Child Matters – Change for Children*⁸ sets out the five mutually reinforcing outcomes that are most important to children and young people: be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; and achieve economic well-being.

The Children Act 2004

The Children Act 2004 secured Royal Assent on 15 November 2004 and provides the legislative spine on which to build the reform of children’s services in England. This Act sits within and extends the Children Act 1989 and is supported by extensive statutory and good practice guidance.

Section 52 of the Children Act 2004 extends section 22(3)a of the Children Act 1989 (the general duty of local authorities in relation to children looked after by them) as follows:

(3A) the duty of a local authority under subsection (3)(a) to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child looked after by them includes in particular a duty to promote the child’s educational achievement.

Section 52 of the Act places a duty on the local authority in its role as the corporate parent to promote the educational achievement of looked after children. This will ensure that decisions on issues such as placement and stability support better educational achievement. The statutory duty to promote the educational achievement of looked after children and safeguard and promote their welfare came into effect from 1 June 2005.

Local authority roles and responsibilities with regard to s52

In supporting the role and responsibility of corporate parent, there is a wealth of regulations and guidance to accompany the new duties. DfES statutory guidance on the duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of looked after children (December 2005) states that local authorities:

“should be doing at least what any good parent would do to promote their child’s educational aspirations and support their achievements”.

BACKGROUND: LOCAL CONTEXT

Harrow’s Looked After Children

As at 31 July 2006, Harrow’s Children’s Services had lead responsibility for 165 looked after children (LAC), a figure fairly consistent with previous years. 95 of Harrow’s 165 LAC (58%) represent BME groups. The gender split for the LAC is: 101 (61%) are male and 64 (39%) are female. The ages of the LAC in Harrow’s care are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Ages of the looked after children in Harrow’s care

Age group	Number of children	Percentage of all LAC
0-4years	22	13%
5-9years	17	10%
10-15years	72	44%
16-18years	54	33%

⁸ *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*, HM Government 2004. This launches a national programme of change *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* which sets out the action local areas will want to take to ensure that services meet the needs of children, young people and families and what Government will do to support local areas.

Harrow has 19 LAC cases open with the Children with Disabilities team and there are 30 LAC with statements of special educational needs. The allocation of placements of Harrow's LAC is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Placements for looked after children in Harrow's care

	In Harrow	Out of Borough
Number of children in foster care	46	28
Number of children in residential care / semi independent living	49	24
Number of children in kinship	19	1

Total number of LAC = 167 (figures as at May 2006)

With regard to educational attainment, in 2004, of all Harrow's LAC, 46% left care with no GCSE's and 11.5% achieved five or more Grade C+. In 2005, 58% of all pupils for whom Harrow is responsible left care with no GCSEs, 8.3% achieving five or more Grade C+. The comparative figures for those pupils educated in Harrow are 28.3% and 18.2% respectively.

REVIEW METHODOLOGY

In seeking to continuously improve scrutiny in Harrow, scrutiny councillors have recently introduced new ways to undertake their investigations of issues, policies or performance. One of these new ways of working is the light touch review - commissioned by a committee at one meeting (in this case, Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee, 27 June 2006) to report back to the next (18 October 2006) with either some key findings or recommendations as appropriate. This is particularly pertinent for issues that do not warrant the detailed consideration of an in-depth review, at least not in the first instance.

A light touch review methodology provides new members a good induction to scrutiny, the subject area and also, in this instance, their responsibilities as corporate parents. This is especially timely and relevant given the new legislation. However a light touch review must be more selective in its focus and activities. For example, the Review Group acknowledges that, in part due to the timeframe of this review covering the summer holiday period, it did not have an opportunity to speak directly to children, young people or their participation officers.

The Review Group set its scope⁹ as the following:

- To examine, analyse and make proposals on the way the council and its members fulfil the role of corporate parents to the borough's looked after children, especially with reference to meeting the roles and responsibilities given in Section 52 of the Children Act 2004.
- In doing so, promote better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of corporate parents and assess the adequacy of services to looked after children to inform the council's improvement agenda.

⁹ The scope document and project plan for the Review Group's work are included in the Appendices of this report.

During the course of this review, the Review Group met on two occasions, with the rest of the work conducted 'online' by members and officers. Activities included gathering and examining performance data sets, developing a questioning plan to seek further elaboration on the most pertinent issues and holding a Question and Answer session with the relevant Portfolio Holder and the Director of Children's Services. This latter meeting involved a local school governor and foster carer in the questioning and subsequent discussions. Integral to the process of the Review Group's work was the use of an IDeA/LGA guide¹⁰ as the toolkit for scrutinising this topic area. This draws upon the expertise and knowledge of local authority staff, councillors and young people who have experience of being looked after, and suggests a number of questions by which to explore the most pertinent issues in relation to the new responsibilities under s52 of the Children Act 2004.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE REVIEW

The findings and conclusions from the Review Group's evidence gathering and discussions¹¹ follow by the key areas of responsibilities, as given in the new duty for corporate parents (s52 of the Children's Act 2004). The local authority's progress on serving looked after children and ensuring their educational achievement will contribute to the annual Comprehensive Performance Assessment and will also be subject to in depth scrutiny as part of the Joint Area Review (both in November 2006). The findings from this review should inform this work.

Strategic planning and accountability

Responsibilities: Children's Services Authorities have a duty to publish a 'Children and Young Person's Plan' which should address the specific issue of the need to make steady improvements in the achievements of children and young people who are looked after by the local authority.

Directors of children's services and lead members are, respectively, professionally and politically, responsible for discharging the authority's duties to looked after children and ensuring their educational attainment is improving.

The Portfolio Holder for People First and the Director of Children's Services are agreed that the single **key** aspiration of the authority for the children and young people who are looked after is that they should achieve the educational outcomes as do their peers. LAC represent a disadvantaged group, not because they are in care but because of what has happened in their lives which has led them to be cared for by the local authority.

The Council has recently started using a new Management Information System to manage its performance data. This will allow a more sophisticated interrogation of the information the authority holds on its LAC and their educational attainment. The Review Group is pleased to hear that performance information reports are produced every six weeks and disseminated to senior management (Chief Executive, Directors, Group Managers,

¹⁰ *Show Me How I Matter: A Guide to the Education of Looked After Children*, Improvement and Development Agency and Local Government Association, March 2006.

¹¹ Witnesses questioned by the Review Group over the course of the review: Paul Clark (Director of Children's Services Department), Gail Hancock (GM, Safeguarding and Family Support Group), Councillor Janet Mote (Portfolio Holder, People First) and Paul Wedgbury (GM+ Children and Families Group).

Portfolio Holder) and the relevant information is fed through to frontline staff. Managers meet regularly to monitor performance and identify any arising issues.

Whilst new systems inevitably take time to embed and acclimatise to, the Review Group is heartened that new data analysis is now coming forward, problems highlighted more efficiently and informing policies to improve the educational attainment of LAC more effectively. Further interrogation of new data sets should allow for more in depth analyses capturing the real issues facing the young people we look after in this borough.

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee has considered the Harrow Children and Young People's Plan¹² at previous committee meetings. Harrow has a fully integrated Children's Services department and a relatively low number of looked after children, however given the nature of the borough and the changing demographics, new families with specific needs may be entering the borough. Local services need to plan for this and the potential increase in thresholds. Members are keen that children on the borders of risk, in terms of potentially needing local authority care, are considered. Supporting these children and their families is vital so that any future risk can be lessened.

The amount of money available within this borough is low compared to all other boroughs in London however Harrow provides better value for money than suggested by its position in the league table of actual funding. Harrow's Children's Services find that there is a need to concentrate resources on those most in need and this sometimes makes it less easy to be engaged in prevention and early intervention when the focus is on reactive services to ensure the safety and well being of children.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

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 the 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 inclusion in its future work programme.

Involving children and young people

Responsibilities: Every authority should involve children, young people, their carers and parents in planning for, developing and improving services both individually and collectively.

There is a statutory responsibility to ensure that young people's views, wishes and needs are taken into account in decisions about their care and each time their needs are assessed¹³. Formal mechanisms are in place to ensure that this is the case in Harrow and therefore that children and young people are formally involved in discussions about their

¹² A strategic plan by the local authority and its partners (see section 17 of the Act) which is a key element in implementing children's trusts.

¹³ Each LAC has a care plan – a formal plan agreed by all involved of how a child or young person who is looked after will have their needs met – what, when and by whom.

care every six months at the very least. Reviews¹⁴ of each LAC's case involve face-to-face interviews with the young person and this feeds into their Personal Education Plan¹⁵. Furthermore, LAC have contributed to the Council's response to the Every Child Matters consultation.

Efforts are made by the authority to ensure that children and young people have real access to the Director of Children's Services and the relevant Portfolio Holder. The Director meets regularly with groups of LAC, the Youth Councils and School Councils. Through the All Party Special Interest Group on children, a number of decision makers meet regularly with over 100 young people. An illustration of where such access and communication has proved successful is when twice a year the Director meets with the Young Care Leavers to look at their service and debate with them things that could help them improve their future. For example changes have been made in the system of helping young people pass their driving test. Given a limited budget, eligibility criteria needed to be developed and the young people themselves undertook this task, in the process setting rather challenging criteria e.g. 95% attendance for two terms at college before being able to request driving lessons funded by the local authority.

The authority has two participation officers who work with a group of young people in care under the name of Young Voices. This group has produced a DVD on the role of young people in their reviews and a Key Health Facts document for young people.

The Review Group is satisfied that Children's Services is doing a good job in adequately involving children and young people and engaging with them on a practical level.

Supporting educational achievement and aspirations

Responsibilities: The local authority should do at least what any good parent would do to promote their child's educational aspirations and support their achievements.

Currently Harrow's achievements academically for LAC are slightly above the London average but will need to improve dramatically to keep pace with the generally high achievement of children in the borough. This is the focus for Children's Services and especially the new multi-agency team for LAC.

Whilst LAC have a number of complex problems and experiences in life that need specifically addressing, the Review Group equally recognises that their achievements and attainments must be celebrated and rewarded. Harrow has demonstrated this in a number of ways including:

- An Awards Ceremony for Children Looked After by the authority
- An Annual Youth Achievement Awards where young people are nominated by their peers
- A Foster Carers' Award, including awards for children
- A visit to Tate Britain, including a special award from the Portfolio Holder
- The Director of Children's Services writing out to all those taking exams to wish them luck

¹⁴ There is a legal requirement to review a child or young person's care plan after one month, three months and then every six months when they start to live in care.

¹⁵ A personal education plan is a plan for how a young person who is looked after gets their educational needs properly met.

- Providing work experience to individuals to help with their studies e.g. working with the council photographer to complement a Media Studies course

Extra-curricular educational support is also available. This month has seen the start of a new specialist homework club to support LAC, their parents and foster carers – the “Sunshine Project” operates at the Teachers’ Centre and is aimed at primary and junior school children, providing computing facilities to aid their learning. Throughout the summer, LAC are fully integrated into all of Harrow’s summer activities.

The Review Group has learnt that due to budgetary constraints, all awards ceremonies are being merged into one event and therefore there will no longer be a separate event dedicated to LAC. The Review Group has discussed the merits of an inclusive and integrated event for all children and young people regardless of their background, against the need to give young people who have experienced particular hardship or adversity, a special event and a well-deserved ‘pat on the back’. Each approach had its advantages and these should be explored further.

The People First Portfolio Holder has said that from her own experience she has enjoyed these events for LAC, as they present an opportunity to informally meet the young people at a social event - an opportunity that does not often present itself on other occasions. The Portfolio Holder has stated her wish to see these separate events for LAC continue, however she recognises the financial constraints associated with this and therefore the only way forward may be to merge with other events or seek sponsorship to fund the event. It is agreed that the views of LAC should be sought in deciding the best way to proceed with regard to celebrating the success of LAC in the borough.

The Portfolio Holder reiterated that all councillors are corporate parents and so have a responsibility to support LAC, recognise their achievements and thus should be involved in such events.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

That this authority continues rewarding LAC for their achievements. The Review Group recommends that the views of LAC are sought in exploring the best ways to celebrate these successes in an awards ceremony and that a budgeted proposal is developed on the options for such an event, including details on funding options e.g. corporate sponsorship.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

The Corporate Parenting Group ensures that every member of the Council attends as many as possible LAC events per year to ensure they remain in touch with looked after children and young people and fulfil their responsibilities as corporate parents.

Securing appropriate education

Responsibilities: When children and young people come into public care, allocated social workers, supported by the local authority infrastructure, should ensure that the children have a suitable educational placement that minimises disruption to their education, have a

named lead person responsible for their personal education plan and have the services provided to support that plan within set time periods. Admission policies must reflect the priority given to children and young people who are looked after.

Harrow's admissions criteria give clear priority to LAC in attaining school places. The Review Group is satisfied that the admissions policy is working in this respect and is reassured by the authority's strategy of prevention through early intervention in LAC moving schools i.e. 'managed moves'. However, as noted in Recommendation 1, those children and young people 'on the border' of becoming looked after by the authority must be borne in mind. In some cases, additional work on challenging the attitude of some schools and teachers towards these young people who may sometimes be seen as having challenging additional needs, may need to be undertaken.

Effective personal education plans

Responsibilities: All children and young people who are looked after should have a personal education plan (PEP) whatever their educational circumstances.

PEPs are very important in developing and charting the educational lives of LAC. However, they should not be seen as merely another document to be completed for children and young people but rather as a living document that evolves as the needs and circumstances of the young person changes. LAC themselves can write reports for their PEPs so the PEP is a living document. At the hub of an effective PEP should be allowing the young person to get hold of the educational opportunities they need for their development and personal growth. The Review Group stresses the need to ensure that the quality of PEPs is equally as robust for those young people educated out of borough.

A critical factor in ensuring placement stability is increased multi-agency and multi-disciplinary support to placements. In June 2006¹⁶, Harrow launched its proposal to focus long-term corporate care for LAC through one dedicated LAC team of professionals, and partners were invited to help develop these plans. The social care core is ready with the team manager's post currently advertised. This team will bring together a number of professionals from other agencies and disciplines to manage a LAC 'virtual team' which includes a LAC education officer, Connexions worker, youth worker, LAC nurse, CAMHS worker, drugs and alcohol outreach worker, social worker and an youth offending team outreach worker. The inclusion of an educational psychologist will help ensure that PEPs are education driven. This 'virtual team' will look at issues impacting upon LAC and their carers, focus on LAC life chances and outcomes and replace a number of previous groups/forums. Governance arrangements will mean that this group reports to the Children's Services Management Team and the Corporate Parenting Group. The Review Group endorses the development of this multi-agency/discipline group and believes it should progress the steady work towards a Children's Trust for Harrow by 2008.

Supporting the educational achievements of children leaving care

Responsibilities: The duty to promote the educational achievement of children and young people who are looked after extends to those young people who are leaving care (s23a-s23d Children Act 1989). Local authorities should ensure that each young person's Pathway Plan into independence builds on their educational progress when they were looked after, includes details of how they will be supported to stay in further or higher

¹⁶ Children Looked After Team Launch, 5 June 2006 at Harrow Teachers' Centre

education, and ensures they are given support to access services to prepare for and obtain employment, education or training.

Time constraints did not allow the Review Group to consider this area of responsibility in any depth.

Sharing information effectively through interagency and inter-authority co-operation

Responsibilities: Local authorities should, in the context of statutory guidance, on information sharing establish and maintain inter-authority and interagency arrangements and protocols for sharing relevant information about care placements and education.

Time constraints did not allow the Review Group to consider this area of responsibility in any depth.

Actively supporting schools and raising their awareness about the needs of children and young people who are looked after

Responsibilities: Local authorities should ensure that schools understand the duties on the local authority and their powerful role in significantly improving the educational experiences and life chances of children and young people who are looked after, and make suitable arrangements for designated teachers to fulfil their responsibilities.

Each school has a designated teacher and governor who has received specialist training in meeting the needs of LAC and child protection issues. In the borough there exists a list of these professionals with designated responsibilities however nothing beyond that. In the absence of any formal network, the Review Group strongly believes that these specialists would benefit from access to advice and the sharing of experience from others with similar responsibilities. It would be particularly important to share learning and experiences if their school were to take a LAC. The People First Portfolio Holder is in agreement that a support network would be useful to exchange good practice.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

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.

Reducing unnecessary out of authority placements

Responsibilities: Local authorities should take steps to reduce their dependence on external placement where external placements are not in the best interests of the child.

Time constraints did not allow the Review Group to consider this area of responsibility in any depth.

Supporting children and young people who are looked after in secure accommodation or placed in a youth justice setting

Responsibilities: Where children and young people who are looked after are placed in secure settings they should have full access to education and training consistent with their statutory entitlements and minimal disruption to their education on entering or leaving that setting.

Time constraints did not allow the Review Group to consider this area of responsibility in any depth.

Providing training, development and support for carers, teachers and local authority staff

Responsibilities: Foster carers, residential social work staff, designated teachers and social workers are trained in their responsibilities to promote educational achievement, and receive the right support to do so.

Corporate parenting is a vitally important responsibility for every elected member and must be delivered within the 'Every Child Matters: Delivering Change for Children' agenda established by the Children Act 2004. A Green Paper setting out the government's new strategy for looked after children is due out shortly and the National Children's Bureau, funded by the DfES, will also launch a new toolkit for councillors to help them fulfil their corporate parenting role towards LAC and care leavers.

As part of members' induction in Harrow, councillors are advised of their corporate parenting duties. This could be broadened, perhaps led by the Corporate Parenting Group in informing, educating and encouraging peers about their responsibilities.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

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.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information on the work of Review Group, please contact:

Nahreen Matlib

Address: Scrutiny Team, Harrow Council, PO Box 57, Civic Centre (3rd Floor West Wing), Harrow HA1 2XF

Tel: 020 8420 9204

Email: nahreen.matlib@harrow.gov.uk

Website: www.harrow.gov.uk/scrutiny

APPENDIX A: SCOPE DOCUMENT

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE
SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE
2006/07**



LIGHT TOUCH REVIEW OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

1	SUBJECT	Looked after children
2	COMMITTEE	Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee
3	REVIEW GROUP	<p>Members:</p> <p>Councillor Mark Versallion – Review Group Chairman Councillor Margaret Davine Councillor Mitzi Green Councillor Narinder Mudhar Councillor Sasikala Suresh Councillor Jeremy Zeid</p> <p>Co-optees: Mr Alton Bell - Association of Harrow Governing Bodies</p>
4	AIMS/ OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To assess how well the council is performing as corporate parents against the duties contained in new legislation (Section 52 of the Children Act 2004) • To help position the authority as part of the preparations to respond to the Joint Area Review and Comprehensive Performance Assessment processes. • To consider ways in which the council, schools and other agencies can promote good educational attainment for looked after children. • To suggest ways in which the council and partner organisations can best deliver services for looked after children in order to stimulate dialogue and understanding between members and managers.
5	MEASURES OF SUCCESS OF REVIEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of the performance of the council as corporate parents so as to best meet the needs of looked after children in the borough. • Establishing a means of dialogue in order to contribute usefully to improved outcomes for looked after children. • To ensure all members understand their roles as corporate parents to assist in a more effective corporate parenting function within the organisation.
6	SCOPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To examine, analyse and make proposals on the way the council and its members fulfil the role of corporate parents to the borough's looked after children, especially with reference to meeting the roles and responsibilities given in Section 52 of the Children Act 2004.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In doing so, promote better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of corporate parents and assess the adequacy of services to looked after children to inform the council's improvement agenda.
7	SERVICE PRIORITIES (Corporate/Dept)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make Harrow safe, sound and supportive Empower Harrow youth
8	REVIEW SPONSOR	Lynne McAdam, Service Manager Scrutiny
9	ACCOUNTABLE MANAGER	Paul Clark, Director of Children's Services
10	SUPPORT OFFICER	Nahreen Matlib, Senior Scrutiny Officer
11	ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	Existing resources from within the Scrutiny Team
12	EXTERNAL INPUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders: children and young people, foster carers Partners: schools (headteachers and governors) Experts: IDeA, Local Government Association, other local authorities
13	METHODOLOGY	<p>Stages for the light touch review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify current policies Examine how performance matches policies – consider responses to the IDeA suggested questions (written) Identify issues arising – question senior managers and members (written/oral) Seek external input – children and young people and schools (e.g. primary/secondary school governors), either through existing data or fresh information (e.g. invite to a meeting, focus group, questionnaire) Determine how to inform policies <p>The Review Group will meet on two occasions (at the start and end of the process) with most of the work conducted 'online', outside of meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting 1 (31 July 2006) - to agree scope and determine questions for senior managers. August – collation of responses and data. Meeting 2 (18 September 2006) – to seek elaboration on responses from appropriate Director and portfolio holder(s). Second part of the meeting for Review Group members to agree observations, draft findings and frame recommendations. Final report to be completed by the end of September. Report to be presented to the next meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee (18 October).
14	EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS	The involvement of children and young people in this review would give due consideration to their individual needs e.g. taking account of their own experiences, the need for confidentiality, language requirements, disability needs, familiarity with a setting

		as formal as council committees.
15	ASSUMPTIONS/ CONSTRAINTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That council officers and children and young people will be willing to engage, especially given the timeframe covers the lead up to the Joint Area Review. • That the timescale will be sufficient to prepare a considered and relevant report with recommendations, especially given that the timeframe covers the holiday period and there may limit access/availability of members, schools and children and young people.
16	SECTION 17 IMPLICATIONS	There are none.
17	TIMESCALE	Light touch review of three months, reporting back to the next meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee on 18 October 2006.
18	RESOURCE COMMITMENTS	Scrutiny Officer, with administrative support where required.
19	REPORT AUTHOR	Scrutiny Officer with review group.
20	REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS	<p>Outline of formal reporting process:</p> <p>To Service Director <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> When: September meeting</p> <p>To Portfolio Holder <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> When: September meeting</p> <p>To CMT <input type="checkbox"/> When.....</p> <p>To Cabinet <input type="checkbox"/> When.....</p>
21	FOLLOW UP ARRANGEMENTS (proposals)	To be confirmed – in project plan.

APPENDIX B: PROJECT PLAN

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE 2006/07



LIGHT TOUCH REVIEW OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

OUTLINE PROJECT PLAN

Activity	Member Input <i>Who is involved?</i>	Officer Resource <i>Who is involved?</i>	When
Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee commissions a light touch review of looked after children, to report back to its next meeting	Children and Young People Committee		27 June 2006
Develop scope	Chairman – Councillor Mark Versallion	Nahreen Matlib (Senior Scrutiny Officer) in consultation with Paul Clark (Director of Children's Services)	Early July
Preparation period - preliminary research and desk top data gathering	Review Group ("online")	NM	Early July
Initial contact with stakeholders – Harrow governors (including article in Harrow Governors' Newsletter)	MV	NM Neetha Atukorale (Governor Services Co-Ordinator)	Late July
Meeting 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Group agrees scope Briefing on new statutory responsibilities (Section 52 of Children Act 2004) Identification of information/data needs 	Review Group	Paul Wedgbury (Group Manager+, Children and Families)	31 July
Collation & evaluation of preliminary data/evidence	Review Group ("online")	PW	7 August onward
Identification of questioning plan for question and answer session with portfolio holder and Director of Children's Services	Review Group ("online")	NM	W/c 14 August

Activity	Member Input Who is involved?	Officer Resource Who is involved?	When
Meeting 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of information received • Final preparation of questioning plan • Question and Answer session with portfolio holder and Director of Children's Services • Consider observations and frame findings and recommendations (review group determines thrust of report) 	Review Group Review Group Review Group Councillor Janet Mote - Portfolio Holder People First Review Group	NM PC NM	18 September
Draft report	MV	NM	By 26 September
Review Group comments on draft report and accountable manager confirms factual accuracy	Review Group ("online")	PC	By 3 October
Comments incorporated into final draft of report		NM	By 4 October
Review Group agree final report	Review Group ("online")		By 6 October (agenda dispatch 9 October)
Final report of Review Group to Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee, for approval	Children and Young People Committee		18 October
Consider if there is a need to publicise report findings	Review Group	NM	Late October
Final report published & referred to Executive for consideration (Cabinet/Portfolio Holder/Directorate – depending on issues/recommendations)	MV	NM	November/ December
Evaluation of review process	Review Group	NM	November
Follow up/Monitoring of outcomes	Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub- Committee	NM	Work programme 2007/08

Contact : Nahreen Matlib, Senior Scrutiny Officer, Scrutiny Unit, Harrow Council

Background Papers:

'Show Me How I Matter: A Guide to the Education of Looked After Children', Improvement and Development Agency and Local Government Association, March 2006.