

Corporate Parenting Report 2011/2012

Cllr Dawn Cousins - Cabinet Member for Children and Education/Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board

I am very pleased to present this report to you as I believe it reflects the importance that the Isle of Wight Council (IWC) gives to ensuring that its children in public care are safe, cared for and achieving well. An enormous amount of work over the last 12 months has gone in to improve the life experiences of children in care. I believe that this is starting to show. However, there is much more that we should be doing to give looked after children the best starting point from which to enter adulthood and we will continue to make sure that the support we give them is the very best we can offer.

I would like to thank all those involved in making this progress possible. Their hard work is very much appreciated.

Message from Chair of Children in Care Council

I am Naomi and I have been the Chair of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) for almost two years. In the last year particularly we have made good changes to improve how we work with the Corporate Parenting Board. Issues that have been discussed at the CiCC have been acted upon and it is nice to see that actions and good outcomes are happening from the conversations we have had. Cllr Cousins has worked with me closely throughout, both by coaching me in my role and advocating strongly for the issues we raise and our involvement in decisions.

Two examples of how things are working so well now are improvements made through the CiCC raising issues and the Action Groups resolving them. One was the issue of communicating with your Social Worker. Young people found it hard to get through to Children's Services. On hearing this at the Action Group, the Commissioner immediately arranged to get mobile phones for each of the teams and young people have direct access to their team. This has already made a difference to me and other young people I know are in care.

The other shining example of how well things are working is the very recent increase of the Leaving Care Grant. When young people said that it was not sufficient, Councillors Cousins and Cameron supported our young people to attend a parliamentary meeting discussing it, Action Groups were involved in these discussions and the culmination was the Corporate Parenting Board agreeing to double the grant from £500 to £1000. Furthermore our concern for care leavers who had accessed it already was listened to. As a result it was agreed that they were also entitled to the increase in grant.

The biggest measure of success for me is that young people are now beginning to have confidence that when they raise issues or have discussion, it makes a difference. As with the examples above they can see that when they speak, it is being taken seriously and actions are happening.

In the coming year we will continue to do the work above. We will also continue to deliver the Involving Young People Training and attend regional/ national meetings to represent Island Children in Care. There are positive signs that next year we will be able to reflect on positive outcomes as we have this year. I know opportunities for work experience and apprenticeships are being explored. This I am particularly delighted with. As Children in Care have a hard start in life and sometimes don't achieve academically, opportunities such as this can go a long way to inspiring a young person to better things and being the best they can be!

Particular thanks has to go to Councillor Cousins and all the officers that have contributed to making sure we are heard and then making such positive changes.

Message from Director of Children's Services

The last year has seen some major changes in the way that we support looked after children. Re-shaping our children's social care teams in July 2011 has enabled us to provide a better response to the needs of our children and young people, their birth families and their carers. Our ambition is to provide the best opportunities to improve children's experiences and either support them to return home successfully or achieve stable, caring and supportive alternatives.

I am also pleased with the progress that we have made looking after children and young people's educational and health needs and in supporting them into work and independent living, progress that is only possible with the support of colleagues in other parts of the council, the NHS and our schools.

The Corporate Parenting Board, chaired by the Lead Member for Children has provided a focus for driving these improvements and the engagement of members of the Children in Care Council, foster carers, birth parents and elected members in the Board's work is making a real difference.

Corporate Parenting Board

During 2011 developments around the Corporate Parenting Board itself were introduced, with the creation of three action groups chaired by cross-party members (corporate parents); attendance on the board of foster carers and birth parents and a developing leadership from within the Children in Care Council.

Each action group assumed responsibility for some of the 'Pledges' made by Full Council towards children in our care in order that they are not just rhetoric but a live commitment evidenced in action. The Action Groups are outlined below:

- **Health and Happiness Action Group – chaired by Cllr Churchman**
- **Education and future Action Group – chaired by Cllr Taylor**
- **Your Care Experience Action Group – chaired by Cllr Bacon**

The energy of the action groups has already seen some incremental changes to the lives of Looked After Children. The participation officer reports the following: *'one of the biggest benefits has been that young people have more confidence in being able to raise issues and those issues being dealt with. There are multiple examples, such as the need to improve lines of communication and the request for information, where young people are happy with the resolution offered.'*

Some of the key achievements of the action groups have been:

- Improving the template of the personal education plans (PEPs) through consultation with young people in order that it was more user-friendly. Feedback has been positive regarding the new template.
- Oversight of the use of the Pupil Premium to satisfy corporate parents that it is being targeted towards improving attainment
- Increasing the level of the leaving care grant from £500 to £1000, backdated for three years.
- Updating the contents of the 'Welcome Packs' that are provided to each child entering care.
- Ensuring that LAC are provided with door keys to their foster placement wherever possible
- Addressing the issue of difficulty in contacting social workers via purchasing dedicated unit mobile phones

In October 2011 Full Council approved the Corporate Parenting Strategy and re-affirmed the Pledges (which were written by looked after children themselves). They are as follows:

- provide welcoming, safe and stable placements, where children and young people in care can stay for as long as it meets their needs
- help children and young people in care to stay in touch with their family and friends and visit them, if possible, even if they don't live on the Isle of Wight (IW)
- try to avoid any changes of social worker unless absolutely necessary. We will give children and young people a proper explanation of any unavoidable changes. Children and young people in care will have a social worker who is easy to contact, will see them regularly, can speak to them in private, and with whom they can build a trusting relationship
- help children and young people in care sort out any problems or worries they may have and support them with any issues concerning their background, present or future
- take an interest in the health of children and young people in care and encourage them to be involved in sports, leisure activities and hobbies. We will ensure that they have opportunities to go on holiday and/ or on trips
- promote a more positive start to the lives of children and young people in care by offering support and guidance in their choices for employment, education and training

These pledges provide the framework for the Corporate Parenting Board and guide the activity of the action groups.

Further key milestones within the last year have been the Ofsted inspection of the Adoption Service in September 2011 (see P7) and the external assessment of the council against the LILAC (Leading Improvements for Looked After Children) standards in August 2011 (see P11).

Recruiting suitably qualified and experienced staff remains a challenge that has very real impacts on both the quality and consistency of practice. However, it is pleasing to report that at the time of writing we are shortly to be almost fully staffed and any vacancies that emerge from now on will simply be natural and expected staff turnover. The continuance of the social work salary 'market supplement' has undoubtedly contributed towards this.

Placement Stability

When a child enters the care of the local authority (LA), it is crucial that they are placed in a setting that is well matched to meet their needs. It goes without saying that this can make the difference as to how well they do in school, their feelings of self-worth and happiness and whether they grow up to be happy, healthy and well-adjusted adults. Most of our looked after children live with foster carers. At the time of writing, 27 of the 148 children have needs which are so complex and/or challenging that they are placed outside of our own provision. For some, these are in independent fostering placements – both on and off Island – and for others these are in residential homes or schools. Wherever possible, we try and cater for Island children on the island so that they can remain within their community, stay within their school and friendship groups and have easier contact with their families. They can also be seen more easily by their social worker and other staff. If children have to go off Island into the independent sector, we nevertheless work hard to plan for a return to their home community as soon as this is feasible. We have successfully returned a number of young people to the island through our 'Specialist Placements' scheme – foster placements that benefit from a higher level of social work and therapeutic support in order that the carer can manage some extremely challenging behaviours, on occasion.

All councils have two performance indicators regarding 'placement stability' that are measured annually; although the Corporate Parenting Board considers performance at every meeting. These are as follows:

- **NI 62 – number of placements.** This relates to children who have 3 or more changes in placement within a year; therefore the lower the % the better
The IOW performance for 11/12 is 12%. This is an improvement on 10/11 (15.5%) and places the authority in the 'good' banding.
- **NI 63 – length of placement.** This relates to children living in the same placement for over 2 yrs; therefore the higher the % the better.
The IOW performance for 11/12 is 48.9%. This is a deterioration compared to 10/11 (50.8%) and places us in the amber banding, where further questions should be asked.

We will continue to work hard to ensure that children experience as few moves as possible. This is a complicated issue which includes, the recruitment, retention, training and ongoing support of foster carers, having an array of preventative services that avoid children entering care in the first place; having good assessments of individual children's needs which can then be matched against the skills of carers; working to return children home from care and ensuring that support services are available to assist the family as they resume care of their child.

They also include having the ability to assess and support members of the extended family and friends to take over care of their relatives (either via Special Guardianship Orders, Residence Orders or these family members agreeing to become a specific foster carer for the child); a highly performing adoption service that can exit children from care via adoption; and quality social work practice that will reduce risk to children and will stabilize behaviours so that children's needs can be catered for either at home or within our own LA resources. These and a number of other actions are contained within the **Placement Stability Plan** that is attached at Appendix A.

Fostering

On the Island we have traditionally approved foster carers to have only a very narrow age-band of children placed in their care. While there are often valid reasons for this, such as new carers wishing to start their fostering career with an age group of children that they feel most confident to manage, there are many other occasions where this approach has not enabled the authority to place children with perfectly competent carers as they had not been approved to take that age group. Frequently, social workers would need to return to the Fostering Panel every two or three years to request a widening of the approval category as the child in placement got older. We have now adopted a far more pragmatic approach with the Fostering Panel and, subject to our assessment of the carers, will frequently recommend approval for 0 – 12 yrs or 12 yrs+. It is now mandatory for all councils to have a clear statement as to how they intend to enable LAC to remain in placement (converted to 'supported lodgings') beyond their 18th birthday if they remain in education for over 16 hrs/wk. This is a positive step for young people, although will inevitably have an impact on the availability of carers to take on additional foster children.

We currently have 76 sets of carers (of whom, nine are also registered to provide supported lodgings); 13 supported lodgings providers and 25 'Connected Carers' (who are approved just to take on a member of their family). At the time of writing, we have 148 children in the care of the LA, of which 27 are placed in independent sector placements. It is of note that at the time of the last full 'Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspection' in September 2010, the IW were looking after 193 children. This is a significant reduction within a two year period and within a national context of rising care figures. National research undertaken by the **British Association of Adoption and Fostering** estimates that there are approximately 59 children in care for every 10,000 children under the age of 18. The IOW has approx. 28,000 children, which would suggest an equivalent figure of 175 children in care.

Recruitment of new carers particularly targets those who could be matched with teenagers or sibling groups. We also regularly analyse the most effective marketing strategies and ensure that our advertising campaigns reflect this. During this year's national 'Fostering Fortnight' 22 potential carers requested packs. The lead member was interviewed on 'IW Radio' during Fostering Fortnight as part of the strategy to raise the profile of fostering among residents.

Fostering agencies must now comply with National Minimum Standards and a detailed training handbook has been produced that links each training element to how this will assist carers achieve the minimum standards. Training is not now optional but an essential requirement in order to demonstrate compliance with standards.

Foster carers are involved in working up proposals that will reward carers for developing the skill-set that equip them to take on the most challenging of children. In many authorities, carers are rewarded for taking on those children with the most complex needs and there is frequently a disincentive for carers to identify that improvements have been made with the child as they risk having financial enhancements removed from them. By attaching the reward to the skills of the carer rather than the needs of the child, we both remove such disincentives and reward the competence of the carers. This will be another step towards ensuring the best possible match between carers and looked after children. It is anticipated that the new scheme will be implemented in April '13.

A very small number of children (5) on the island are known to be living in private fostering situations. This is where a parent has placed or abandoned their child to the care of someone else. These placements need to be regulated to ensure the children are safe (Victoria Climbié was a privately fostered child). These young people are also entitled to leaving care services. The number of privately fostered child on the IW is significantly lower than would be expected for an authority of this size. We believe that private fostering situations are not recognised as such and the authority is not being notified. A number of awareness-raising campaigns have been undertaken in order to alert people to potential private fostering arrangements.

Residential care

For some children, their disabilities, abuse, psychiatric profile or challenging behaviours mean that residential care is the only option. This might be a residential school specializing in autism, for example, or it might be a small children's home with 2:1 staffing able to manage criminal or severe risk-taking behaviours. A number of monitoring mechanisms are in place to assure the authority that these children are both safe in placement and progressing as they should.

As a matter of policy, no child is placed in any provision graded by Ofsted as other than 'Good' or 'Outstanding'. Providers' inspection reports are scrutinized prior to a placement being considered.

The IW is a member of a consortium called 'CCRAG' (Children's Cross Regional Arrangement Group). This group allocates each constituent member a cohort of providers to visit and assess. Information is then shared with the group in order that a clearer picture can be painted of the standards and ethos of each independent sector provider.

Any child in placement (whether in foster or residential care) must be visited by their social worker within the seven days of the start of placement. On the IW, however, we have stipulated that all children should be visited within 72 hrs of the start of placement. This is because we believe that a child should see their social worker as soon as is reasonable in order to manage the frequently traumatic removal into care or change of placement. Thereafter, social work visits should be at a frequency of no less than six weeks. The Independent Reviewing Officer also visits the placement six monthly in order to review the child's care plan and ensure there is no breach to their human rights. In reality, it is likely that

the child's Looked After Children reviews (one month after placement, three months later and six monthly thereafter) are likely to take place within the residential setting.

The home's daily log is examined to confirm that staffing ratios are met and that the child is receiving their education and medical/therapeutic support as identified in their care plan. Children are offered the services of an Independent Visitor if they are particularly vulnerable/uncommunicative or have little contact with their family. This is an independent means of satisfying ourselves as to their safety in the event that the child does not feel able to tell their social worker. Under development is a stamped addressed postcard system that each young person placed off-Island will be given that will go directly to the Director of Community Wellbeing and Social Care in his statutory role as Director of Children's Services. This will be a red-alert that the child should receive an immediate visit. The child is always provided with details of the advocacy scheme commissioned by the authority, in the event that they wish to make a complaint about their social worker or some aspect of their care.

Beaulieu House

The island retains just one residential care home specialising in children with severe and complex disabilities. This provision has been consistently graded either good or outstanding by Ofsted and offers a mixture of full-time and respite residential care; plus a range of outreach activities either as part of the child's care plan or via the 'short breaks' offer. These may provide a break for parents and siblings and may frequently be the break that prevents a child entering full time LA care. Where a planned series of short breaks or periods of respite adds up to 75+ days/year, the child automatically acquires 'looked after child' status.

Adoption

In September 2011 the authority's 'adoption agency' (the adoption service) underwent its adoption inspection and was graded 'satisfactory'. This was just six weeks into the restructure, and inspectors did comment informally that had they conducted their inspection the following year they would probably have graded us 'good'. However, we are currently satisfactory and nine recommendations were made (compared to 14 in the previous inspection) of which three were merely to 'continue to ...' undertake the plans that were already in train. Some of these recommendations related to post-adoption support for birth parents, children and adopters, write children's guides to how to make a complaint and to refine some existing processes. Inspectors concur with our assessment that good placements are made, as evidenced by the low numbers of adoption breakdowns.

In May 2012 the government published Adoption Scorecards, a national initiative to identify those authorities who are delaying the matching and placing of children for adoption. The three measures are as follows:

- Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family. ***The IW ranked 49th out of 149 authorities. The threshold for this measure was placed at 639 days; the 3 yr rolling average for IW was 563 days.***

- Average time between a LA receiving court authority to place a child and the LA deciding on a match to an adoptive family. ***The IW ranked 63^d out of 149 authorities. The threshold for this measure was 213 days; the 3 yr rolling average for IW was 154 days.***
- Children who wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. ***57% of IW children wait less than 21 months; which ranks the IW 83^d out of 149 authorities.***

For authorities dealing with small numbers of adopters, such as the IW – where an average of just eight adoptions occur per year, the speed relating to just one child can have a significant impact on the data. However, no one would dispute the importance of swiftly placing children into their adoptive placements and a number of improvements have been made to accomplish this such as handing over case responsibility from the LAC units to the adoption units once the placement order has been made, in order to speed up the completion of the child's profile and enable matching with prospective adopters. The authority has also joined the national adoption register. The regional consortium of which we are members has, to date, always facilitated high quality placements but the national adoption register offers another alternative should the consortium not have a suitable family within the child's timescale.

The regional consortium is a collaboration between a number of authorities in the south who pool the adopters that have been assessed for potential placements and then take out of the pool as and when a placement is required. This suits the island particularly well as almost all of our children are placed with adopters off-island for reasons that are probably evident.

Social work practice

The LAC units have worked hard to achieve consistently high standards across the workforce. Currently the completion rate of **Personal Education Plans** (PEPS) stands at 97.4% (112 out of 115 children). This compares with performance of just **49.5%** in Oct '11; and represents solid month-on-month improvement; and is in large part testament to the success of the learning development advisors who have an unrelenting focus on the educational outcomes for LAC.

A more thorough approach to performance monitoring has been adopted by the LAC group managers to ensure that all our statutory responsibilities are discharge in a timely and professional manner. The frequency of statutory visits has been a focus of attention and group managers report a near 100% compliance rate with the six weekly visiting regime; with unavoidable reasons recorded for those that do not take place (sickness, court dates etc).

The quality and timeliness of court reports is improving although still a work in progress. One of the outcomes of the recent **Family Justice Review** has recommended halving the time taken to complete care proceedings to just 26 weeks. This will inevitably have an impact on practice and capacity although it is welcome news in terms of care planning. It remains to be seen whether court listings themselves can accommodate these new requirements. Over the last year a number of children have had their care orders discharged so that they can leave the care of the LA and return to their families. This is both beneficial for these children, who have now been assessed as safe to be brought up within their families; and for the remaining

resources for LAC. The promotion of **Special Guardianship Orders** (SGOs) in this authority is a real strength and places us above the national average. This is an alternative to stranger adoption, where the extended family is conferred with full parental responsibility by the court in order that they can raise the child within their family of origin. This means that the child will grow up knowing their identity and origins and, where appropriate, having some sort of relationship or knowledge of their abusive or neglectful parents, whilst kept safe by their wider family. In so doing, there is not the pull to seek out their lost birth families experienced by many adopted children; nor the misplaced belief of a 'fantasy' family that can frequently figure. Whilst adoption is appropriate and in the best interests of the child in many situations, the Children Act 1989 charges us to consider placement within the wider family first and foremost.

One of the performance measures we scrutinize is **the % of children who have ceased to be looked after resulting from the granting of an adoption order or Special Guardianship Order**. Performance during 11/12 was good with 20.6% of children (27 out of 131) leaving care for these reasons.

A number of small but significant changes have been made as a result of complaints made by looked after children. For example, one young person complained that he didn't have much contact with his social worker because he behaved himself, whereas if he didn't behave he would probably see more of her! As a result, we provided a dedicated mobile phone for each social work unit so that regular text contact can be made with each looked after child, letting them know that their social worker was thinking about them or reminding them of the next visit etc.

Other young people have complained about the level of Leaving Care Grant on the IW (in order for them to purchase a reasonable level of equipment in order that they can leave their foster placement and live independently). This is indeed below most other authorities. We involved the young people themselves to produce and cost a basic essentials list that was then be scrutinised by the Corporate Parenting Board as to its reasonableness and as a result the level of grant was increased.

A number of other consultations and audits have been undertaken in order to satisfy ourselves that we are promoting best practice for example, a significant number of LAC nationally report that they are not allowed a door key to their foster home and must wait outside until their carers return home to let them in. Local consultation has revealed that this is not the case on the Island and children are satisfied with their arrangements for getting into their homes.

We will shortly be undertaking some consultation with LAC as to their experience over the years of supervised contact with their birth families, to establish whether this has been positive or whether there are lessons to be learned.

During the last year, we have struggled to recruit staff at the Consultant Social Worker level. This has led to instability in the staff group and a reliance on agency staff. This has inevitably had an impact on both morale and capacity. The recruitment process is continuing.

Health and Dental information

Children often enter care with a worse level of health than their peers, in part due to the impact of poverty, poor parenting, chaotic lifestyles and abuse or neglect. There is a higher level of mental and emotional health need amongst looked after children.

In line with the *Statutory Guidance on promoting the health and well being of Looked after Children (2009)* Isle of Wight NHS Trust complies with requests from the LA in relation to health assessments and the completion of holistic health care plans.

Under the Care Planning Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 the first health assessment must be carried out on entering care by a registered medical practitioner. The first health assessment should result in a health plan by the time of the first review and within four weeks of becoming "looked after".

During 11-12 the Paediatric Consultant at St Mary's Hospital undertook a total of **38 initial health assessments**. **100%** had appointments offered to meet the statutory 28 day requirement. Whenever possible the assessment will be carried out by the child's own Paediatrician if there is one.

Review health assessments can be carried out by an appropriately registered nurse and take place annually if the child or young person is over the age of five years or six monthly if less than five years. The child's named health visitor undertakes the six monthly reviews unless they are already in the care of a Paediatrician in which case the review is shared.

The reviews undertaken by the Children in Care Nurse are designed to be flexible, holistic and ensure health promotion advice tailored to the needs of the young person is offered. Feedback from the Children in Care Council was positive in relation to the nurse led assessments alongside a clear message that young people wanted to be seen outside of school, either at their foster home or a neutral venue but not at St Mary's Hospital.

All Looked after Children over the age of five years also have access to their school nurse as part of universal services including targeted immunisation programmes and health education.

During 11 to 12 a total of 103 review health assessments were carried out. **91% (94)** were offered within the recommended time frame. **15 young people (13%)** declined the offer of a health assessment appointment. The majority of these young people were contacted by the children in care nurse and encouraged to attend or ensure they had access to Primary Care Services (GP) as a minimum. The majority of young people declining review appointments were 16 years plus of age and choose to attend their GP when they needed health care.

For both initial and review assessments it is vital that partnership working between social care and health ensures that the correct information and up dated consent is obtained in order to facilitate a timely appointment in line with the guidance. Regular meetings have been held with the LAC Unit Mangers and the Unit Coordinators to ensure a smooth process is in place for timely assessments in conjunction with the Child Health Admin Team.

Following the last joint Ofsted / CQC inspection quarterly care plan audits have been undertaken to ensure high quality care planning and to monitor the completion of outstanding actions. These have demonstrated proactive & timely care planning.

During 11-12 89% of looked after children had completed up to date immunisations.

Incomplete immunisations were notified to the relevant Practice Nurse to facilitate an appointment. Looked after Children were also included in targeted immunisation programmes including seasonal flu and HPV.

The most recent data shows that 82.8% of Looked after Children had a dental check during 11 - 12. Any child or young person not registered with a local Dentist or in need of urgent dental care are referred to the local dental health clinic for allocation and receive priority treatment.

All health assessments are recorded on the British Association for Adoption and Fostering Association (BAAF) record in line with best practice. This takes into account the views of the parents, carers and where appropriate the child or young person in contributing to their health plan.

An area of development for the coming year is a greater responsiveness to the emotional needs of looked after children including the introduction of a screening tool to be incorporated with the yearly health assessment; discussions have taken place with Community CAMHS to take this forward.

The education and attainment of looked after children

Whilst nationally, the attainment of LAC is improving, it is not doing so at the same rate as the rest of the population and therefore the gap is widening. On the Island, this is particularly true at KS2 and 4.

The small cohorts on the island mean it is particularly difficult to set any meaningful targets for attainment. However, we are able to predict attainment progression, which is a measure of whether the child's learning has developed at the rate predicted through teacher assessments, even if they do not achieve a formal GCSE pass.

The appointment of a Virtual Headteacher (who has the oversight of all LAC's education on the Island) in October 2011 means that there is a suitably qualified senior manager within the authority who holds the ring for the attendance and attainment of LAC. The role of the Learning Development Advisors based in the LAC units also focuses on the practicalities of ensuring LAC are attending school, that their placements offer the right climate for learning and that each child's personal education plan is a meaningful document that promotes learning in its widest sense.

During Easter 2012 the learning development advisors coordinated a camp to support the more specific needs of our LAC. The LAC Easter Camp was based on the successful 'one to one tuition programmes' that have been promoted for all pupils in past years. These camps are for students who are off track with their learning and the aim is to give them an opportunity

to link their studies with new learning in a different environment. One to one tuition as part of the Easter camp approach made a significant difference to confidence and attitude of the young people that attended. Aside from a focus on building confidence, there was also an academic component focused on improving attainment in key academic subjects and in critical skills.

Twenty four students took part. They undertook English, maths and critical skills in the morning and water based activities in the afternoon. A full evaluation is available but the success this year has re-focused our planning for 2013 where we will focus on LAC in Y6 and Y11 and support the upcoming assessment points for those year groups.

We have prioritised the performance of pupils and students in Y6 and Y11 over the last 12 months and their progress has been closely tracked. Where possible, the Fischer Family Trust (FFT) database has been used which enables targets to be set based on earlier attainment performance. It is a good tool for use with formal exams eg KS2 and GCSE but we have attempted to give targets for all our pupils and track their progress.

In Y6 in 2012 100% of our LAC achieved the government benchmark of L4+ in English and 33% in maths; therefore, the single measure of % of LAC achieving level 4 in English and maths was 33%. The cohort is of just 3 children in yr 6.

In Y11, just 50% of students achieved their predicted targets. No students achieved 5 good GCSEs including English and maths.

At the time of writing, we are aware of one student achieving 2 A' level passes, one BTEC and one International Baccalaureate (equivalent to 3 A' levels.)

The most recent annual school attendance data (Autumn 2011) showed significant room for improvement and is a particular priority for the learning development advisors and for the Education Welfare Service.

Our performance regarding care leavers in employment, education or training is 'good' (**72.2%**). However, more can still be done. We are currently working up a scheme for wider debate and approval that will adopt the approach of encouraging 'our' (corporate) children to enter the family business (ie the council) by creating apprenticeships ring-fenced for care leavers. These will be matched to those areas where there are vacancies in the jobs market and additional support will be provided to selected young people to make sure they are 'work ready'. If agreed, up to five apprenticeship opportunities will be created.

LILAC Assessment (Leading Improvements for Looked After Children)

In August '11 the authority was assessed by a project called 'National Voice' which evaluated the participation and involvement of LAC. The assessment was undertaken by a small team of care leavers from other parts of the country; and the authority was assessed against seven outcomes. Five of these were deemed to have been achieved and the team of assessors felt that the IW was trying hard to listen and consult with young people, although some of this was still at an early stage and at that time difficult to evidence.

Over the last 12 months the Children's Rights and Participation Officer has worked hard to broker immediate solutions to issues that have been raised by young people and be on-hand to challenge any poor practice that emerges. He also supports the Children in Care Council and the Corporate Parenting Board. Thanks to a case study that he brought to the CPB earlier in the year, it was established that not all children entering care have a suitcase for their belongings because these are stored at a different venue. As a result, suitcases have now been placed in a number of different sites where children may present as homeless. The Participation Officer organises the annual 'Have your Say Day' in which LAC and their carers are invited to give us their views on the service, whilst enjoying a day-out for the whole family. The feedback is taken very seriously and acted upon during the following year. The 2011 'Have your Say Day' was also an opportunity for young people and foster carers to meet all the staff in their respective units.

The Lead Member for Children's Services and Education ensures that she meets regularly with LAC and seeks their views. Appropriate challenge is then levied at the senior officers in order to satisfy herself that children's wellbeing and safety is assured.

Star Awards

The IW, in common with many authorities, has committed itself to an annual event that celebrates the achievements of children in its care. This is always enormously well-received and a source of pride for many young people who receive public recognition for their achievements or for overcoming adversity. Approximately 300 people attended last year (looked after children, foster carers and staff) and a number of young people commented that the star awards are the highlight of their year. A number of offers of help and support have already been received this year and it is a true partnership affair.

Policies

A number of policies are due to be signed off under delegated decision by the Lead member for Children Service's and Education within the next month. These are the Foster Carers Charter and the Family and Friends Policy. These are attached at Annex 2 and 3.

The Independent Reviewing Unit

The function of this unit is to oversee the delivery of the child's care plan and to ensure that their human rights have not been breached. They are the arms-length quality assurance in the system ensuring that the child is being seen, that their education, health and contact needs are being addressed, that there is a current assessment on file and that their wishes and feelings are being listened to. In order to raise the level of formal challenge between Independent Reviewing Unit (IRU) and social work units, a dispute resolution protocol has been written and a transparent method of logging and challenging poor practice is in place. Where disputes cannot be resolved internally, the IRU has recourse to involve Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS).

From 1 July 2012, the statutory Director of Children's Services took over the role of accountability for this unit (from the Deputy Director) in order to strengthen its challenge and scrutiny function. The development of this unit has been challenging over the last 12 months. A restructure has seen a change in personnel and approach. However, it has proved difficult to recruit permanent staff into these roles and is the cause of ongoing concern. The end goal is for children's reviews to be far more child-centric, with fewer attendees (the information having been gathered prior to the meeting thereby dispensing with the requirement for a large group of professionals to be present). Where appropriate, the child/young person themselves will be encouraged to chair parts of the meeting so that they can take back some control over their lives and the decisions that are made for them.

Despite the turbulence in this service, there was still a participation rate by young people in their reviews of **95.2%**, and **80% of looked after children consulted** (during 2011/12) **think services to them are good or better**. Additional ways for children to express their satisfaction with the service they receive are being developed. **97.8% of LAC reviews were completed on time** during 2011/12.

Young People Missing from Care

Young people going missing or not returning to their foster placements is a problem that the council takes seriously. It leaves those young people at risk and also strongly suggests underlying problems and causes that they need help with. For the last year the Children's Rights and Participation Officer has been developing a way to contact those young people and offer to meet with them. This is to see if there is anything the department can do to help them and avoid their decision to go missing again.

In practice those young people that go missing are ones that have disengaged, as such many decline to meet. However, of the cases recently, there have been good outcomes for the young people who have engagement with their unit.

This is an initiative that aims to improve situations for these young people above what is already on offer.

Conclusion

In conclusion then, 2011/2012 has seen major structural changes and a number of areas of improvement. The energy of the Corporate Parenting Board members and the commitment of staff across the organisation and beyond is a real strength. Strides have been made to improve accessibility of social workers and to increase the amount of time spent with young people and foster carers. The availability of therapeutic support has prevented a number of placement breakdowns during the year, whilst other young people have successfully been brought back to the Island from mainland placement. However, there are some crucial indicators where we must improve over the next 12 months. Early indications suggest that the school attendance of looked after children has not increased; unverified data reveals that nearly a quarter of LAC fall into the category of 'persistent absentees' ie. they are out of school

for the equivalent of a **month** during the academic year. The Virtual Headteacher is analyzing this in more detail and will be coordinating resources so that greater impact can be made. A report will be brought to the Corporate Parenting Board so that sufficient scrutiny and challenge can be provided to the proposals.

We also need to understand the reasons why children are not remaining in placement for more than two years and will undertake an analysis of this statistic. The Corporate Parenting Board will scrutinize the Placement Stability plan to ensure that this is having the desired effect.

A joint approach is being developed to meeting the housing needs of young people aged 16+ and vulnerable to becoming looked after. There is insufficient supported lodgings on the island and young people frequently enter the care system by default, or scarce fostering placements are converted into supported lodgings providers to meet the needs of older teenagers; thereby removing these carers from the pool that can be used for children in care. We are considering this situation in more detail with housing colleagues.

A smarter approach to recruiting carers is being implemented. A consultation is planned with carers in order that advertising campaigns can be targeted to achieve maximum impact. A report to the Corporate Parenting Board has been requested.

We continue to advertise for permanent independent reviewing officers in order that the service can establish a greater level of participation of young people and increased challenge of practice. Until this team is in place, limited progress can be made in this area. The current financial year will not see staff time and energy diverted into restructures but will concentrate on improving outcomes for children in care; which is as it should be.

Annex

1. Placement Stability Plan
2. Friends and Family Policy
3. Foster Carers' Charter