

REPORT TO: Executive Board
DATE: 16th July 2009
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Children & Young People
SUBJECT: A Pledge to Children in Care
WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To seek approval for a proposed Pledge to Children in Care in Halton.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

- i) Executive Board endorses the Pledge to Children in Care
- ii) Executive Board endorse action to promote the Pledge in order to raise awareness in the Council, Children’s Trust and with other partners.
- iii) Young people report annually to Executive Board on progress of the Pledge to Children in Care.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The Government’s Green Paper “Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Young People in Care” and the subsequent White Paper “Care Matters: Time for Change” identified steps that needed to be taken to improve outcomes for children and young people in Care.

3.2 The Children and Young Persons Act, which received royal assent in November 2008, then set out the reforms that were needed to transform the life chances of Children in Care. The Act strengthened the statutory framework around the Care system to enable children and young people to receive high quality care and support, and drive improvements in the delivery of services focussed on the needs of the child.

3.3 One of the key aims of these developments was to improve the role of the Corporate parent and Children’s Trusts. It is with the Corporate parent that responsibility and accountability for the wellbeing and future prospects of Children in Care and Care Leavers ultimately rest.

- 3.4 A good Corporate parent must offer everything that a good parent would, including stability. It must address both the difficulties which Children in Care experience and the challenges of parenting within a complex system of different services. This means that Children in Care and Care Leavers should be cared about, not just cared for, and that all aspects of their development should be nurtured. This requires a Corporate approach and across all of the agencies involved in the Children's Trust.
- 3.5 Corporate parents are the officers and Members of the Council and members of the Children's Trust.
- 3.6 It is important that children have a chance to shape and influence the parenting they receive.
- 3.7 In order to improve the role of the Corporate parent the Government announced their expectation that:-
- i. Every Local Authority should put in place arrangements for a Children in Care Council, with direct links to the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member. This would give Children in Care and Care Leavers a forum to express their views and influence the services and support they receive
 - ii. Every local area should set out its 'Pledge' to Children in Care and Care Leavers, covering the services and support that they should expect to receive
 - iii. The Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children's Services should be responsible for leading improvements in Corporate parenting
- 3.8 Halton established its Children in Care Council in December 2007. Since that time the functioning of the Council has developed, its membership has grown, and there have been some clear outcomes achieved for children.
- 3.9 At the moment, the Children in Care Council meets at least 4 times a year. Meetings are held in school holidays at one of the Youth or Children's Centres. Children in Care (over the age of 8) and Care Leavers are invited to attend a full day event which is made up of fun activities, consultation on a particular theme and a meeting involving Senior Officers, the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member.
- 3.10 The consultations that have taken place so far include the Pledge itself, Personal Education Plans and Children in Care Reviews.
- 3.11 At the moment, the Children in Care Council is co-ordinated and facilitated by Officers, but it is hoped that in the future, the young people themselves will feel able to Chair the meeting, set the agenda and issue invitations to officers and other agencies to

attend.

- 3.12 A newsletter and website are about to be launched so that all Children in Care, and not just those who attend the meetings, are aware of developments and proposals.
- 3.13 Work on the Pledge commenced in October 2008 and concluded with the young people accepting the final version at their meeting in May 2009. (Appendix 1).
- 3.14 The Pledge is a document which should ensure that Children in Care and Care Leavers are aware of the key opportunities that are offered to them locally and that they are consulted and involved in the development of the Pledge.
- 3.15 The Halton Children in Care Council were able to consider some examples of Pledges, all of which were very 'wordy', long and detailed. The young people felt that such a document had no meaning to them, was not something they would read, and was too complicated. They clearly expressed that what they would prefer to see was a very visual Pledge, that was easy to read, looked 'bright', and that addressed the basic things that are important to them. They have expressed their needs through Art.
- 3.16 The Pledge that is now presented (Appendix 1) is the result of the consultation with the Children in Care Council and uses their own artwork. It lists the 10 things that Children in Care and Care Leavers say are key to improving outcomes for them. The pledge is supported by the following statements made by our Children in Care and Care Leavers;

Privacy – “not everyone needs to know our business”

My Time – “ why does everything have to be done or decided by a time set by adults, we want to make choices in our time ”

Somewhere to live – “ we want a permanent home, a place of our own, not a place you can only stay for six months”

Love and affection – “ we want to be cared for like we are part of the family, not because the carer is being paid”

Sleeping out at mates houses – “ why do all my friends have to be checked, we want to be able to sleep at mates when we want, without having to wait for an answer”

Pocket money – “ we know that not every child in care gets pocket money every week”

Family and stability – “we don't want to be moved around, we want a family where we can stay, but want to keep in contact with our real families”

Friends – “ we are children and young people not case numbers, we want to be able to see our friends in a normal way”

A job - “ a real job and support with our accommodation and paying bills”

Family contact – “we want support to see our own families”

3.17 Officers, Members, the Children’s Trust and other partners all need to contribute in order to achieve the commitment contained within the Pledge.

3.18 The Pledge will be monitored by the Children in Care Council and supporting officers. The executive Board will receive an annual report on young people’s findings.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The Pledge is consistent with national policy, the Care Matters agenda, Halton’s multi-agency strategy for Children in Care and legislation.

5.0 **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The Pledge is consistent with the Council’s responsibility as a Corporate Parent.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL’S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

The Pledge is consistent with ensuring the best possible outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers and in promoting their life chances.

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

Improving outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers and ensuring that they receive the appropriate education and are supported to find employment are essential to their long term economic prospects.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Improved outcomes will contribute to the emotional and physical well being of Children in Care and Care Leavers.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

Improving outcomes and raising the aspirations and achievements of Children in Care and Care Leavers will contribute to constructive and long term options for them.

6.5 **Halton’s Urban Renewal**

Improved outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers will enhance their own and the Borough's economic environment.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 There are no significant risks associated with the Pledge.

7.2 The local area is required by Government to have a Pledge in place.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 Improving the life chances of Children in Care and Care Leavers through ensuring that they receive the services and support they require, will contribute to meeting the needs of this vulnerable group.

9.0 REASON (S) FOR DECISION

9.1 The Children and Young Persons Act, which received royal assent in November 2008, strengthened the role of the Corporate parent. The Government now requires every local area to set out its 'Pledge' to Children in Care and Care Leavers covering the services and support that they should expect to receive.

10.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

10.1 There is no prescribed format for a Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers, the 'Pledge' (Appendix 1), was designed by the Children in Care Council and therefore it is the one they would like the Executive Board to endorse.

11.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

11.1 Immediately

12.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Children in Care Strategy	Grosvenor House Halton Website	Christine Taylor
Care Matters	DCSF Website	Christine Taylor
Children & Young Person's Act 2008	DCSF Website	Christine Taylor