



**Children and Families Overview &
Scrutiny Committee**
10 September 2008

**Report from the Director of Children
and Families**

For Information

Wards Affected:
ALL

Looked After Children

1.0 Summary

1.1 Following the Joint Area Review in 2006, the Children and Families Department developed a radical Invest to Save Programme, in order to achieve both service improvements and to more effectively manage budget pressures. The Objectives of the project are to reduce the number of children who become looked after and improve both the quality and location of placements provided for those for whom there is no alternative to becoming looked after. A report was presented to the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee in April 2007 outlining the details of the Invest to Save Programme.

1.2 This report provides an update on the progress of the Invest to Save Programme and on LAA targets in respect of Looked After Children's education.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is invited to:

- Note progress since the April 2007 report
- Note progress on achieving the LAA Targets
- Note the areas for priority action during 2008/09 and the identified challenges and risks to sustaining the same rate of progress.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 From April 2007 to end of March 2008, a total reduction of 34 Looked After Children (8.5%) was achieved, which is on course towards the department's target of 300 Looked After Children by the end of March 2010. This has been achieved through the use of new services designed to give intensive support to families with children on the threshold of care and improved gate keeping by the Heads of Service, the Children's Placement Panel and the Commissioning and Resources Team.
- 3.2 **The Commissioning and Resources Team**, established in August 2007 as part of the Invest to Save Programme, finds and commissions high quality, cost effective care placements for children and young people for whom there is no alternative to becoming looked after. The team also assists with creative services and packages for children and young people on the threshold of care.
- 3.3 Over the course of 07/08, the team achieved a reduction in spend on external placements of almost £1.3m (8.5%). This has been achieved by the reduction in Looked After Children numbers; increasing the use of Brent placements; and clearer and more cost effective commissioning arrangements with external placement providers.
- 3.4 **The multi-disciplinary Crisis Intervention and Support Team** worked with 131 families and young people in 07/08. The team directly prevented 14 young people from becoming looked after and assisted in the rehabilitation home of 8 further young people. So far in 08/09, the team has prevented 12 young people from becoming looked after and assisted the rehabilitation home of 6 further young people. The team operates a rapid response service to avoid young people becoming accommodated in an emergency and its multi agency approach has proved highly successful. Due to the success and effectiveness of this team its remit is currently being expanded to work with children under 12 who have child protection plans or whose behaviour or family situation has resulted in their being on the edge of care.
- 3.5 **The Family Group Conference Service** has also had a significant impact in preventing children and young people becoming looked after and in ensuring that they are cared for in their family of origin if their parents cannot care for them. In 07/08, the service worked with 56 referrals (96 children) and has held 36 conferences (for 68 children). This has assisted in preventing 19 children either from becoming looked after, or to assist their rehabilitation home, or to be placed with kinship carers. The Family Group Conference (FGC) model focuses on family empowerment and in harnessing the strength of the extended family to care for children and to find safe family solutions. FGC's are used for children of all ages – adolescents in conflict with parents; for younger children at risk of harm; to resolve care plans during early stages of care proceedings; for children who have parents with substantial or recurring problems, such as learning disabilities or mental health problems.
- 3.6 **Fostering Service** - during 07/08, we successfully recruited to the new Marketing Post for fostering and adoption. We have embarked on an

ambitious recruitment campaign for both foster carers and adoptive parents, underpinned by a recruitment and retention strategy. This has resulted in a significant increase in fostering enquiries. Systems have been reviewed and resources are in place to ensure that enquiries and assessments are robustly progressed, with the target of successfully recruiting a minimum of 25 additional mainstream foster carers in 08/09.

- 3.7 During 07/08, we achieved a reduction in the use of Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) carers of 14.5% and, in conjunction with the recruitment of additional Brent foster carers above, we have an ambitious target for 08/09 of reducing this by a further 20%.
- 3.8 We have also reduced our overall use of external residential provision by 18%, by using appropriate foster placements for young people with challenging behaviour. In addition, for those adolescents where residential provision is required, we have developed and strengthened our partnerships with local providers at more cost effective rates. This has also enabled young people to be placed locally. This includes the joint partnership between St Christopher's and the 3 boroughs of Brent, Westminster and Camden, to provide a small children's home for young people with highly complex needs. The home opened in November 2007.
- 3.9 **Contact Service** - We have developed an in-house Contact Service, to provide supervised contact for Looked After Children with their parents and other family members, and this became operational in November 2007. The service has so far recruited 18 sessional contact workers and provides improved quality and consistency of contact for children with their family members as well as better value for money. It is a priority for this year that the cost of the contact service is reduced.
- 3.10 **Semi-independent provision** - We have successfully developed our Brent Shared House scheme in partnership with Brent's Housing Resource Centre. The Scheme provides local and more accessible accommodation and support for 16-18 year old looked after young people. The scheme enables packages of floating support to be tailored to meet the individual needs of the young person. In 07/08, 4 shared houses were commissioned, providing placements for 15 young people. We have targets for an additional 4 houses and 16 placements in 08/09. In addition, Social Care is working with the Supporting People Team to review services to young people and it is anticipated that this will lead to some joint commissioning arrangements between Children and Families and the Supporting People Team.
- 3.11 The department continues to experience rising numbers of complex and child protection referrals to children's social care services. This in turn impacts on the numbers of initial and core assessments; child protection investigations; child protection case conferences, care proceedings and the number of children and young people accommodated. In addition, Brent has a significant number of families with large sibling groups where it has been necessary to accommodate the children. These factors present real challenges in sustaining and continuing to improve the reduction in the overall numbers of Looked After Children.

3.12 As we have become more successful in diverting some young people from becoming looked after, those who then do become looked after tend to have the most complex needs and require placements where their needs can be met. This is proving to be an additional challenge and it is proving difficult to recruit foster carers who have the capacity and level of skills to care for young people with complex needs.

3.13 **LAA Targets** - The Education Team for Looked After Children have a remit to improve the educational outcomes for Looked After Children in Brent from nursery to end of year 11. The team works across all stages/ages of the National Curriculum and has a series of pro-active programmes, e.g. early years and year 6 transition programmes; literacy programmes; booster classes; homework clubs; support and training to foster carers. The team also works with individual children and teachers in both primary and secondary schools.

3.14 There are 2 LAA Targets in respect of the educational outcomes for Looked After Children in Brent:

(1) LAA Stretch Target (due 2008/09):

For a percentage increase to be achieved in the number of Looked After Children who attain 5 A*-G or 1 A*-G grade GCSE passes in Year 11 of 2008/09.

LAA Improvement Targets (2009/11):

(i) For a percentage increase to be achieved in the number of Looked After Children who attain 5 A*-C grade GCSE passes, including English and Maths, (numbers increasing year on year) in Year 11 of 2010/11.

(ii) For a percentage increase to be achieved in the number of Looked After Children who attain Level 4 or above at Key Stage 2 in English and Maths (numbers increasing year on year) in Year 6 of 2010/11.

3.15 In order to address the educational attainment of Looked After Children, several factors have to be taken into account – placement stability; the child's ability and motivation; potential attainment of the child; and geographical distance of the child's placement. These factors are considered in identifying predicted attainment groupings and deciding how to improve attainment for those groups. It is a challenge to meet the targets as all Looked After Children are required to be counted in the outcomes despite the fact that many children will not be able to sit for either SATs or GCSEs, e.g. children with special educational needs. In addition, many young people become looked after at age 14/15 and are often already disaffected or have been or are excluded pupils.

3.16 **The LAA Stretch Targets outcomes so far are:**

In 2006/07:

47 were in the cohort (i.e. looked after), of whom 34 (72%) took exams:
4 (8.5%) achieved 5 A*-C GCSEs (including English and Maths)

22 (47%) achieved 5 A*-G GCSEs
8 (17%) achieved 1 A*-G GCSE
13 (27.5%) were not in mainstream school and did not sit GCSEs.

In 2007/08, predicted GCSE results:

39 on the cohort (i.e. looked after)
5 (13%) predicted to attain 5 A*-C GCSEs (including English and Maths)
11 (28%) predicted to attain 5 A*-G GCSEs
6 (15%) predicted to attain 1+ A*- G GCSEs
17 (43.5) not in mainstream school – including 8 with significant disabilities attending special schools.

3.17 The LAA Improvement Target outcomes so far are:

Level 4 or above at Key Stage 2

	English	Maths
2006/07	62%	50%
2007/08 – predicted	56%	53%
2008/09 – predicted	59%	56%

The above figures for both LAA targets show some fluctuations, but also a small year on year improvement. Brent's results are in line with other Local Authorities; however, it is recognised that there still remains a huge challenge and differential between exams results for all children and those who are looked after.

3.17 A project plan for the Invest to Save Programme has been in place since April 2007 and the projects are closely monitored by an Invest to Save Project Board, chaired by the Assistant Director Social Care. A Transformation Board, which is chaired by the Director of Children and Families and also includes corporate membership, has also been established to provide robust challenge and monitoring.

3.18 During the first year of the Invest to Save Programme, some projects were more easily established than others, e.g. the Crisis Intervention and Support Team and the Family Group Conference Service. These projects were able to begin to meet their targets in the first year. Other projects, such as recruitment of foster carers, have been more challenging to establish in the first year. These are now on course to meet the targets in 08/09 but will remain the highest priority for the year.

4.0 Conclusion

There continues to be a high level of support from managers and front line staff for all the invest to save initiatives and we remain optimistic that the projects can deliver the changes needed to improve services and reduce costs. However, it is important to recognise the challenges in achieving these changes and the importance of maintaining an overview of the pressures on

social care, in a climate of rising referral rates, increased complexity of need and increased service demands.

Background Papers

Report for Children and Families Scrutiny Committee – Improving Services for Looked After Children – April 2007

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