IMPLEMENTATION OF CHILDREN (SCOTLAND) ACT 1995

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER BY STIRLING COUNCIL

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To make proposals to achieve better outcomes for children “looked after” by Stirling Council, through the development of quality services informed by the new requirements of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

2 SUMMARY

2.1 The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 placed new duties and responsibilities on Local Authorities.

Since its enactment, the service has steadily progressed a programme of phased implementation.

This report highlights key elements of the next phase. It seeks to ensure the continuous improvement of services for children looked after with the aim of creating a model of best practice within Stirling Council.

2.2 The report focuses on the measures proposed to ensure that all “looked after” children have a written Assessment of their needs and a Child Care Plan based on this assessment, which is reviewed regularly and within specified timescales, as outlined in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 Regulations and Guidance (Volume II).

3 RECOMMENDATION(S)

3.1 The Children’s Committee is invited to note the progress made towards implementing the Council’s responsibilities under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.
3.2 To agree that standards and procedures are produced, and leaflets made available for “looked after” children and their parents, and to inform them about the levels of service they may expect.

3.3 To agree the development of plans which seek to maximise the use of existing resources for “looked after” children, by streamlining procedures, establishing a management information system on the Social Services Information Database (S.S.I.D.), and making explicit the relationship between service goals and budgets.

3.4 To endorse the development of partnerships with other agencies, in particular Health Services and Voluntary Organisations to meet identified gaps in current provision.

3.5 To endorse the continued development of cross service working groups which aim to achieve better outcomes for “looked after” children in relation to their education, training, employment, housing needs, parenthood and social inclusion.

4 CONSIDERATIONS

Children Looked After in Stirling: Summary

4.1 The exact number of children looked after by the Council varies on a daily basis between approximately 150-175 children.

On 15th December 1997 the children looked after in Stirling Council were as follows:

Children and Young People accommodated away from home -

- With Foster Carers 61
- In Residential Placements 15

Children and Young People subject to Home Supervision Requirements -

- (4 receive regular Respite with Foster Carers) 54

Children and Young People who receive regular Respite Care -

- As a preventative measure 7
- Due to Disabilities -

  - Community Respite Scheme 11
  - In Residential Placements 9

TOTAL 157

4.1.1 The provision of a range of placements reflects the range of needs presented by young children and their families.
4.1.2 At the 15th December 1997, twenty-six of the “looked after” children were also on the Child Protection Register. The total number of children at that point on the Child Protection Register was forty-nine. Children on the Child Protection Register are involved in two review systems. Consideration is being given to simplifying and making the processes involved more understandable to children and their families. This will necessitate establishing a unified system.

4.1.3 Currently children with disabilities are serviced by Social Workers and Occupational Therapists in the Community Care Service. Most of the “looked after” children who receive regular respite do so because of their disabilities.

These arrangements are being reviewed to achieve a more holistic approach to services and will involve close collaboration and co-operation with colleagues in Education and Health Services.

4.2 Progress on implementation

4.2.1 To ensure that service developments were informed and thorough and progressed in a uniform and comprehensive way, and as part of the reconfiguration of the Children, Young People & Families Service arising from reductions in the 1996/97 budget, a Team Manager’s post was redesignated: Manager: Child Care Planning Review and Development.

The remit of this post is to take a lead role in the design, development and implementation of the systems to underpin and give effect to the requirements of the Children (Scotland) Act in relation to the categories of “looked after” children.

4.3 Developments have continued and three particular areas for future development are highlighted.

4.3.1 Child Care Assessments

The Act requires that all children “looked after” have an assessment of their needs. The assessment process aims to identify the needs and problems which face the child and other members of their family, and their potential for relief, reduction or change.

The assessment process should involve parents, carers or others who have recently had care of the child. A multi-disciplinary assessment is usually the best means to provide a full picture of the child’s needs.

4.3.2 As a critical component in ensuring that the best interests of children are given due recognition, the Service revised and has now implemented the Young People and Families Action Pack as part of a pilot process to evaluate the best means of providing a comprehensive assessment. (Report to Children’s Committee 20th March 1997).

4.3.3 In addition, each Social Worker is involved in a comparative study of looking after children (LAC) Assessment and Action schedules being piloted by the Scottish Office.

This material is specifically for use with children accommodated for more than six months and is intended to ensure careful planning. An
evaluation programme has been built into the process and is being supported by Stirling University. The findings of the research evaluation will be used to inform the final format of the material to be produced by the Scottish Office before January 1999. Within Stirling Council decisions can then be made about the relative merits of the different assessment models. (Report to Committee: 20 March 1997)

4.3.4 Child Care Plans

Children's Care Plans outline the personal needs of the children and the objectives for each individual child. The plans are developed in consultation with parents and children and informed by all those involved with the child. The format and content of care plans are outlined in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 Regulations and Guidance. Again the (LAC) assessment and action schedules will help to identify a consistent and agreed format. The care plans are expected to indicate the range and level of services to be provided for the child and the support available to parents and carers.

4.3.5 The local authority has a duty to promote direct contact between children “looked after” and their parents or people with parental responsibilities.

4.3.6 In addition, where appropriate, provision of written as well as verbal information at every stage of the looked after process must be considered.

4.3.7 The Local Authority is also required to monitor the placements of children “looked after”.

4.3.8 The Child Care Plan is at the heart of the process to ensure that children are provided with the level of care they require. The Plan is to be monitored, reviewed and updated so that it remains relevant. The Plan should also help to ensure that children are only looked after for as long as is necessary and beneficial for them.

4.3.9 Child Care Reviews

4.3.10 Local Authorities are required to review the circumstances of all children who are looked after by them. Detailed regulations prescribe how the reviews are conducted. Reviews provide the cornerstone for monitoring, adjusting and developing plans to meet the needs of children looked after by the Local Authority. Prior to the Act, only children “in the care” of the Local Authority were reviewed. Now all children “looked after”, including those on supervision requirements require to be reviewed at specified intervals.

4.3.11 The current Review system inherited from Central Region is being revised and developed to reflect new requirements, research findings, and to give effect to the principles underpinning the Act to take account of children’s views and to work in partnership with parents.

4.3.12 This represents a very considerable undertaking involving widespread consultation and the development of Information Technology. The Manager: Child Care Planning Review and Development is currently seconded to the SSID Project for one day per week, to assist in setting up the new assessment care planning and review system. A training
programme is planned for February 1998 in relation to practice requirements. Further training will be required in relation to SSID. The target date for implementation of the revised systems and processes is 1 June 1998.

4.4 Conclusions

4.4.1 The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 provides a unique opportunity for Stirling Council to demonstrate that it has the imagination and commitment necessary to ensure that intervention in children and families lives will lead to positive change.

4.4.2 This process will be assisted by the publication of the Children’s Services Plan in April 1998. Better outcomes can be achieved by developing corporate approaches which direct the wealth of existing resources within the Council towards solving the complex problems associated with “looked after” children.

4.4.3 Working with this generation of “looked after” children to achieve their potential and be successful in their adult life, should help to reduce future numbers of children “looked after”, and enable more resources to be redirected towards non-statutory and preventative work in the spirit of the Act.

4.4.4 Research highlights the facts that “looked after” children are over-represented in the adult population in terms of physical and mental ill-health, homelessness, unemployment, offending, alcohol and drug abuse, and domestic violence. Many “looked after” children have parents who were themselves previously in the care of Local Authorities.

4.4.5 It is for these reasons that it is imperative to ensure that every effort is made to mediate the effects of “being looked after”, and to ensure that children and young people looked after are supported in achieving their potential to be active and fulfilled citizens of the future.

4.4.6 The recommendations outlined in 3.1 to 3.5 above will provide a framework to take forward this important agenda.

5 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The submission supports the Council’s stated values, vision and strategic aims to promote Sustainability, social inclusion, quality and the implementation of a Best Value Regime.

6 CONSULTATIONS

6.1 Consultation began on the dates specified with the following groups and is intended to be part of an ongoing process:
Young people who are being Looked After 26 November 1997

Foster Carers 2 and 3 December 1997

Residential Staff in Brucefield Children’s Unit 20 November 1997

3 Operational Children, Young People and Families Teams 26 November 1997, 18 and 19 December 1997

Housing and Social Services and Education Liaison Meetings 19 December 1997

Reporters to the Children’s Hearings 6 November 1997

Other Local Authorities via British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering Training Day on Child Care Reviews 4 December 1997, Children in Scotland “Planning to Care” Seminar 4 December 1997.

Scottish Office for meetings regarding piloting of Looking After Children materials.

It is hoped to develop a support group for parents of “looked after” children with whom to consult throughout the development and thereafter.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 This proposal is being made within existing resources. However, it should be noted that it does place on staff and systems quite considerable new burdens.

8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 • The White Paper “Scotland’s Children”.

• The Children (Scotland) Act 1995

• The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 Regulations and Guidance: Volume 2: Children Looked After by Local Authorities

• Reports to Children’s Committee 19th November 1996 and 22nd May 1997

• A Policy for the Provision of Services for Children, Young People & their Families: Children’s Committee 20th March 1997
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