

Executive Summary

Despite high ambitions and a shared commitment for change, outcomes for children and young people in care have not sufficiently improved. There remains a significant gap between the quality of their lives and those of all children. Tackling this requires urgent, sustained action across central and local government, from practitioners in all aspects of children and young people's lives and from their carers, friends and family. The support we have had for this work has shown us that this drive and commitment exists across the country and at every level of children's services.

This White Paper sets out the steps that we will take, together with local delivery partners, to improve the outcomes of children and young people in care. It builds on responses to the Green Paper *Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care* and the conclusions of four working groups established to investigate best practice in supporting those in care. In delivering this White Paper we will work in partnership with local government, the voluntary and private sector and the wider children's workforce to ensure that we achieve lasting change for this important group.

1. Children and young people in care¹ tell us that they want to lead normal lives. They want to succeed in education, enjoy a wide range of positive activities and make a successful transition to adult life. First and foremost, those in care are children and young people. We must have high ambitions and expectations for them. We must help them to reach their potential by providing excellent parenting, a high quality education, opportunities to develop their talents and skills, and effective support for their transition to adulthood.
2. Unfortunately, circumstances outside their control mean that children and young people in care face a number of barriers to achieving this aim. As a result of their experiences they have often had a disrupted education, they may have difficulties with their social and emotional wellbeing, and they often lack stable relationships in their lives,

¹ This White Paper uses the term 'children in care' to include all children being looked after by a local authority, including those subject to care orders under section 31 of the Children Act 1989, and those looked after on a voluntary basis through an agreement with their parents under section 20 of the Children Act 1989

resulting in attachment problems and a lack of resilience. It is vital that carers and other professionals give children and young people in care the encouragement and support necessary for them to overcome these barriers and succeed.

3. We have already taken a number of important steps to improve the lives of children and young people in care. However, despite improvements in outcomes in recent years, there remains a gap between the outcomes of those in care and outcomes for all children:
 - In 2006, only 12% of children in care achieved 5 A*-C grades at GCSE (or equivalent) compared to 59% of all children;
 - Their health is poorer than that of other children. 45% of children in care are assessed as having a mental health disorder compared with around 10% of the general population;
 - Over 50% of children in care responding to *Care Matters* said that they had difficulties accessing positive activities;
 - 9.6% of children in care aged 10 or over, were cautioned or convicted for an offence during the year – almost 3 times the rate for all children of this age; and
 - 30% of care leavers aged 19 were not in education, employment or training (NEET).
4. It is vital that, as part of creating a socially just society, we improve this

situation and narrow the gap between those in care and their peers. Some groups of children are over-represented in the care population – for example, disabled children, and some ethnic minority groups. It is important that reform is taken forward in a way that reflects this diversity.

5. Children and young people in care have a unique place in society. They have a special relationship with the State due to the fact that they have been taken into care either through a court order or by voluntary agreement with their birth parents. Central government, local authorities and their partners in children's trusts, individual professionals and carers all share responsibility for ensuring the best for children and young people in care – as they would for their own children. Children in care should be *cared about*, not just cared for.
6. The difficulties faced by those in care cannot be overcome by any individual or part of the system acting alone. It requires a coordinated approach across the whole of the children's trust. As corporate parents, we must champion the needs of children in care and deliver the best for them.
7. Through Every Child Matters, local areas are reforming the support that they provide to children, young people and families. Services are being integrated around their needs and provided through new multi-agency arrangements to support vulnerable children and young people with better prevention and earlier intervention. This

support is central to improving outcomes for children in care. In some cases it prevents the need for a child to be taken into care by enabling family and friends to meet their needs; in others it ensures that problems are minimised and are addressed effectively through good early support.

Corporate parenting: getting it right

8. Improving the role of the corporate parent, as part of children's trusts, is key to improving the outcomes for children in care. It is with the corporate parent that responsibility and accountability for the wellbeing and future prospects of children in care ultimately rest. 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. Equally, it is important that children have a chance to shape and influence the parenting they receive. To improve the role of the corporate parent we are:

- **Expecting every local authority to put in place arrangements for a 'Children in Care Council', with direct links to the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member.** This will give children in care a forum to express their views and influence the services and support they receive;
- **Expecting every local authority to set out its 'Pledge' to children in**

care. The pledge will cover the services and support children in care should expect to receive;

- **Making clear that the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children's Services should be responsible for leading improvements in corporate parenting;**
- **Disseminating Government-funded corporate parenting training materials,** developed by the National Children's Bureau, to help authorities to ensure that effective arrangements are in place locally;
- **Introducing an Annual Stocktake of the outcomes for children in care.** This national Ministerial event will review progress for children in care with key stakeholders and representatives of local government, health services and young people in care; and
- **Introducing a three year programme of proportionate inspection,** led by Ofsted, of how local authorities are improving outcomes for children in care.

Family and parenting support

9. Wherever possible we should support children within their own families. This requires a focus on support for parents and the provision of evidence-based parenting programmes and short breaks for families with more complex needs. For those children and young people who need to be cared for

outside their immediate family, we should, at all relevant stages of the care planning process, explore the potential for enabling children to live with or be supported by wider family and friends. To achieve this we are:

- **Asking all local authorities to analyse the profile of their children in care population to ensure that appropriate services for children in care and those vulnerable children living with their families are available;**
- **Funding the development of Multi-systemic Therapy (MST) as an effective specialist intervention for older children and young people on the edge of care;**
- **Providing £280 million to deliver a step change in the availability of provision of short breaks for parents of disabled children** to reduce family stress and ensure they are better supported in their families, as set out in *Aiming Higher for Disabled Children*;
- **Legislating to enable carers who are relatives and not local authority foster carers to apply for a residence order if the child has lived with him/her for a continuous period of at least one year and to apply for residence orders to last until the child is 18; and**
- **Setting out how effective care planning will ensure that children's services continue to work with birth parents while the child is in care and that**

appropriate services are delivered for the child and family to support a child or young person's safe return home.

Care Placements: a better experience for everyone

10. A successful, stable placement is central to supporting the needs of children in care. Carers are at the centre of a child or young person's experience of corporate parenting and should provide the mainstay of their support. To improve the quality of placements for children in care, we are:

- **Improving local authority commissioning of placements, in particular by piloting Regional Commissioning Units.** This will ensure that a menu of appropriate placements, which has been tailored to meet the needs of the child, is available when placement decisions are being made;
- **Strengthening the statutory framework so that a local authority cannot place a child out of their local area unless it is satisfied that such a placement is in the child's best interests.** The authority must ensure that all children placed out of authority receive the same level of support as if they were placed closer to home;
- **Improving foster care by setting clear standards outlining the skills that all foster carers should have and increasing access to specialist training and support.** Foster carers

are central to many children and young people's experience of care. It is essential that we value and support them and ensure that they are properly equipped with the necessary range of skills;

- **Revising the National Minimum Standards for foster and residential care and ensuring better enforcement of these standards** to improve the quality of provision for children and young people in care;
- **Introducing an explicit requirement for all children in care to be visited by their social worker, regardless of their placement type.** Visits can make a real difference to the children concerned, but we know that at present they do not always take place as often as they might; and
- **Exploring, through pilots, the effectiveness of social pedagogy in residential care.** This will build on the experiences of successful residential units currently employing social pedagogues from European countries.

Delivering a first class education

11. A high quality education provides the foundation for transforming the lives of children in care. Those who do well in education are more likely to go on to employment, to lead healthier lives and to play a more active part in society. The Government has made a good education for every child in care a priority, including in school admissions policy. However, we need to do more.

To ensure that children in care receive a high quality education we are:

- **Introducing an expectation that local authorities will arrange appropriate high quality early years provision for children in care under five;**
- **Giving children in care the highest priority in school admission arrangements,** including a local authority power to direct schools to admit children in care even if the school is already fully subscribed;
- Reducing disruption to the education of children and young people in care by **introducing a new requirement that the local authority must ensure that the effect of care planning decisions is not to disrupt a child's education and that they must not move schools in years 10 or 11 except in exceptional circumstances;**
- Ensuring a focus in schools on the progression of children in care by **putting the role of the designated teacher on a statutory footing** and supporting this through training and statutory guidance on their role and responsibilities;
- **Personalising the learning of children in care, including providing £500 a year for each child in care at risk of not reaching the expected standards** of achievement, to support their education and development needs and **increasing the availability of one to one tutoring;**

- **Improving support for reducing school absence and exclusion**, including asking all schools and local authorities to put in place strategies to improve the attendance and reduce the need for exclusions of children in care, and reinforcing the principle that exclusion should be an absolute last resort; and
- **Piloting the role of the virtual school head in 11 local authorities.** Virtual school heads will oversee the education of children in care in their authority, and those children in the authority's care who are placed out of authority, as if they were the head of a single school.

Promoting health and wellbeing

12. Good health is vital to the lives of children and young people. It enables them to lead enjoyable and fulfilling lives and underpins achievement at school and in adult life. The task of improving health should be approached holistically – it is not the concern of the NHS alone. Factors such as secure attachment, friendship and engagement in positive leisure activities also promote health and wider wellbeing. We are:

- **Sharpening the focus placed on the needs of children in care by local health partners** through inclusion in the new joint strategic needs assessment, which underpins health service commissioning, and issuing statutory guidance on the health of children in care to local authorities and healthcare bodies;
- **Setting new standards for the support provided to pregnant young women and mothers in care and leaving care and, subject to the Comprehensive Spending Review, introducing named health professionals for all children in care;**
- **Ensuring that the individuals in day to day contact with children and young people in care are better able to provide sex and relationship education;**
- **Considering introducing a new indicator on the emotional and behavioural difficulties of children in care within the new local authority performance management framework;**
- **Transforming the availability of positive activities for children and young people in care**, including free part time access to extended activities, free music tuition in schools and priority status for children in care within local authority youth work;
- **Introducing an expectation that local authorities will make their own leisure provision free for children and young people in care.** This is consistent with the role of the corporate parent;
- **Ensuring that leisure activities form a key part of care planning** and that children and young people

are well supported in getting involved in these activities; and

- **Placing a new responsibility on the Director of Children's Services to ensure that children and young people in care participate equally in positive activities along with their peers.**

Transition to adulthood

13. Young people in care often have a difficult move to adulthood. The opportunity to delay the change until they are ready is not always open to them, leading to unwanted transitions that happen too fast. At present, there is an expectation that young people leaving the care system will have the skills necessary to cope on their own. However, young people without parental and family support are often exposed to greater risks than other adolescents. To improve the transition to adulthood we are:

- **Preventing local authorities from discharging young people prematurely from their care placements until they are properly prepared and ready to move on to the next stage of their lives.** This will ensure young people's wishes and feelings are respected and that they are fully involved in decisions that affect them. Moves should only take place if young people are properly prepared;
- **Extending the entitlement to the support of a personal advisor up to the age of 25 for all care leavers**

who are either in education or wish to return to education;

- **Piloting ways to enable young people to remain with foster carers up to the age of 21,** providing greater stability for young people more in line with that of their peers;
- **Introducing a national bursary of a minimum of £2,000 for all young people in care who go on to higher education; and**
- **Expecting local authorities to consider, when developing their pledge to children in care, what employment opportunities with training they and their partners can offer young people.**

The role of the practitioner

14. The day to day experience of the corporate parent is embodied for children in care by the work of practitioners. Reforms to services for children in care depend on having a highly skilled, committed and stable workforce that delivers individualised support to children and young people. Children and young people want more stability and they want social workers to listen to them and have more time for them. More needs to be done to tackle recruitment and retention of social workers, and to ensure that they are adequately trained. To improve the role of the practitioner we are:

- **Working with the Children's Workforce Development Council and the General Social Care**

Council on remodelling the social care workforce, to enable social workers to spend more time with the child;

- **Improving the skills and training of social workers** to ensure that they have sufficient understanding of child development and to set their role in the context of the children's services reforms initiated by Every Child Matters;
- **Developing, with partners, tailored recruitment campaigns** which emphasise the particular benefits of working in a children's services environment;
- **Introducing a "Newly Qualified Social Worker" status** that would give a guarantee of support, training and induction to child and family social workers;
- **Piloting 'Social Work Practices' to test whether partnership with external agencies can improve the child's experience of care** and empower the local authority to exercise their corporate parenting function more effectively;
- **Strengthening the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer** to ensure that they provide a more effective check on care planning on behalf of the child, including giving them greater independence; and
- **Ensuring that all children in care who need and want them have access to independent visitors,**

and, when making a complaint, to independent advocates.

Next steps

15. We have articulated a clear and bold vision for all children in care. During the consultation on the *Care Matters* Green Paper we worked hard to engage as many individuals and groups as possible to build the case for new and sustained action. We now need to harness the enthusiasm for change and deliver a reform programme that will benefit today's children and young people in care and also have lasting impact for the future care population. To implement the changes set out in this White Paper effectively we will:

- **Seek the earliest opportunity to introduce the right legislative and regulatory framework**, including bringing statutory guidance and relevant National Minimum Standards into line with the changes in this White Paper. Government has a critical role to play in putting in place the right statutory framework for the care system. The revised framework should enable children and young people to receive high quality care and support, and drive improvements in services. In doing so it should set clear expectations while also giving local authorities and their partners as much flexibility as possible to respond to local needs and circumstances;

- **Provide further resources to implement the necessary changes.**

We will provide an extra £13.5 million in 2007-08 and £89/£96/£107 million over the 2008-11 Comprehensive Spending Review period of which £22.5m has been set aside for a dedicated change fund. Government Offices (GOs) will provide support for local authorities in the effective implementation of this White Paper;

- **Introduce a new partnership model of delivery.**

The responsibility we share for achieving these ambitions means there must be a joint vision for change. We will construct a partnership approach to implementation across the statutory and voluntary sectors; and

- **Work with the private sector.**

The private sector has much to offer children in care. Many major companies already do valuable work –increasing young people’s access to structured leisure activities and the world of work. We will facilitate a long-term dialogue between private companies and the care system, exploring the potential for building major sponsorship programmes which increase opportunities for children in care across the board.