

QUESTIONS FOR COUNCILLORS TO ASK

Baseline Data

All councillors with decision taking or scrutiny responsibilities for children's social services should receive regular reports providing basic activity and cost data, providing answers to the following questions:

Children in Need

- How many children in need are there in your community?
- What is that figure based on?
- What is their ethnic and cultural background?
- What services are provided and how much is spent on them?
- What preventative action is your authority taking to ensure children in need, including disabled children, are not in offending behaviour?

Child Protection

- How many children are on the child care register?
- What is their ethnic and cultural background?
- What percentage are re-registrations?
- How long do children spend on their register?
- How much staff time is spent on child protection work, what does this cost and what are the outcomes?
- Have all the children on the child protection register been allocated a social worker?
- How many children run away or otherwise go missing from residential care and foster care?

Looked After Children

- How many children are looked after by your council, whether on a care order or through voluntary arrangements?
- What is their ethnic and cultural background?
- What type of placement are they in – foster care, residential homes or secure units?
- How much is your council spending on services for looked after children?
- Do all your looked after children have an allocated social worker?
- How many placement moves have children had?
- How many attend school regularly and how many are excluded from school?
- What progress are they making and what are their test scores and examination results?
- How many children run away or otherwise go missing from residential care and foster care?
- How many children have a statement of educational need?
- How many children are involved in offending behaviour?
- What action is your authority taking in partnership with other agencies to reduce this?

Care Leavers

- How many young people leave care at the ages of 16, 17, and 18 and where do they go to live?
- What is their ethnic and cultural background?
- How many young people who left care after the age of 16 are still in touch with their social worker, carer or other approved person?
- What sort of progress do young people make after they leave care?
- How much is spent on after care services, including direct financial assistance to care leavers?

Quality Protects Action Plans

You need to agree with your Director of Social Services a format for receiving regular reports on the progress your council is making with its Quality Protects Action Plan.

You should be asking the following questions:

- Who are the children in your community that need help from social services?
- Have you a picture of the diversity of the community and its particular needs?
- What mechanisms do you have for hearing the views of children and young people about services?
- What does your council want to achieve for the children you are responsible for- for their education, health, growth and development?
- How can you deliver this and how do you know if you are achieving your objectives?
- How will you publicise your objectives and policies on who has a priority for services?
- What services are required to meet the needs of children in your community and who will provide them?
- Have you developed a strategy for commissioning children's services in partnership with health, education and other local agencies?
- Is the balance of your services right? Are you giving enough priority to providing a choice of placements for children entering care, to services for disabled children and to services for care leavers?
- Are your adoption services, family placements and residential care well managed?
- Do some specialist services need to be commissioned in partnership with other neighbouring councils?
- How effective are your quality assurance systems?
- How much will the services you need cost?
- How many staff, with what skills and competencies, are needed?
- Do your political structures help officers and members work together for quality children's services?
- How are your chief officers working together to improve children's services? What is the role of you chief executive?
- How are all councillors working in support of Quality Protects? (Appendix 1)
- How do you know whether your children's services are well managed?
- What management information do you and your officers need? What needs to be done to improve the quality of management information in your council?
- Are your assessment and care planning systems in line with Department of Health requirements? How do you know if they are effective for individual children?
- Is your council's record keeping up to standard?
- Are your internal audit procedures up to standard?
- What needs to be done to improve management skills in your council?