

Date Wednesday 21 March 2001
Title LAC by Gloucestershire County Council
By Cllr Bruce G Allen

We visited Gloucestershire County Council on the 20th February 2001 to attend and sit in on their

'Corporate Parenting Working Group'

Arriving at 10.00am for a 12.00pm meeting, we spent a very useful 2 hours with Margaret Sheather Director of Social Services. Margaret sends her warm wishes and greeting to all her friends at Bucks CC

Brief overview on Gloucester County Council

The current political make of the Council is: -

24 Conservatives..20 Liberal Democrats..15 Labour ..3 Independents

No Party has had overall control since 1985 and no two parties have ever formed a joint administration. This by its very nature creates a very different environment for the running of Committees for both Members and Officers. The Director of Social services works with three spokespersons, rather than one chairman, and, to get a decision made outside of the Committee cycle would speak to all three.

It is a very similar Shire County to Buckinghamshire, very Rural in parts but with its centres of populations and the problems they tend to have by the nature of size and ethnic mix.

They have three main centres of deprivation as defined by Government

- Gloucester: which also has 6% Ethnic population including Asian, African Caribbean and Chinese. This may have come historically from being a dock city close to Bristol.
- Cheltenham: also has some very economically deprived areas amongst the more wealthy ones. (This surprised us.)
- Forest of Dean: Due to the past mining Industry

The population of Gloucestershire is approximately 530,000 as compared to a New Buckinghamshire population of approximately 450,000 giving 80,000 or 17% larger population.

Current Budget 2000-01

	<u>Gloucestershire</u>	<u>Buckinghamshire</u>
Education	£224 million	£201 million
Social Services	£ 88 million	£ 66 million
Environment	£ 28 million	£ 28 million
Public Protection	£ 14 million	£ 61 thousand*
Strategy and Resources	£ 39 million	£ 14 million

*denotes amount for Emergency Planning. Police + Fire contributions are made via local rates rather than County Council budgets.

Social Services Budget will be approximately 5% above SSA, including carrying forward a £3 million overspend for this year.

They have 20 Coverage Care Homes (similar to the Freemantle Trust) who are their biggest provider they also use other providers. Care Homes Associations started by asking for a £50.00 increase for this year, which equates to a 25% increase. This is under discussion and a lower figure is expected to be negotiated..

Council Tax for this year 2001/2002 set at 7.3%

There are four Homes for 'Young People' and two respite care homes for children with learning disabilities. In Buckinghamshire there are 3 homes for young people, 2 providing respite care and 1 providing specialist provision for those with mental health problems.

Children in care

	Gloucestershire	Buckinghamshire
	530	277
	72% (382) with Foster Carers	64% (178)
	28% (148) in homes	36% (99)*

*this includes those in homes, schools, hostels and hospitals

At present visits to the homes are made by volunteers. Council has now agreed that all Members should take part in visits, and this will be put in place after the new Council is elected.

Corporate Parenting Working Group Committee Meeting

The Chairman of the meeting made us very welcome. The Committee furniture I found very supportive, making one feel part of the Meeting. Photograph attached.

The Officer assigned to me (Assistant Director Children and Families) was only in her 2nd week with the Authority and the Committee Clerk in her 2nd month. With all the best will in the world, they could not answer all my questions, hence the slight delay in presenting this report.

This group meets every 2 months and is made up of 10 Members. The 'Working document' this Committee works with and to, is the **YPlan ('Young People Looked After Network')**.

We were given (by E-mail) the **Annual Report** of the YPlan project and is available for Members to read, together with the **YPlan; Project Background**, (this describes how the Project come into being) and '**The future Shape of Gloucestershire's Children's rights and YPlan Service**', how they see the way forward.

There are two 'In the Field' Officers who make the plan work, one full time Officer who gives at least half a day a week and one part time. (Lou Brumby and Terry Barry)

Both were present at the meeting and briefed the Committee on the forth coming '**Annual Speak Out**'. This is an annual event when the '**Looked After Children**' (LAC) talk to the Committee and others to discuss their problems etc on a very informal basis.

They also presented to the Committee the '**YPlan Roadshows for 2001**'. Copy of this programme available for Members. This details the monthly events held at various venues across the County for the LAC. E.g. Cheltenham January, Pantomime - Cinderford March, Keeping Safe – Gloucester April, Speak Out, etc.

I was told turnouts for these events could vary from 2 to 80, depending upon the subject.

Another agenda item was on the 'Achievements Award Scheme' for LAC. This is funded by a local hotel who have put up £1600 over five years to have an annual day of fun and activities and to present awards to those children who have made some kind of achievement in their every day lives.

As a matter of report the two Officers presented to the committee a 12 foot high 'Totem Pole' made by the LAC and a plaque to go with it, words written by the LAC (photographs available). They also reported with the help of the LAC and Foster Parents a redesigning and printing in bright colours of the various Review and Report forms used by Foster Parents and the LAC to document their progress (examples available). These are so different from the current standardized Government black and white stereotypes, I think we should seriously consider and take these on board.

The last but one item was to report the setting up of a Trust Fund by a Councillor's family who had recently died to give 'Bursaries' to LAC leaving Council care and entering into University or Further Education.

The last agenda item was a presentation by Cllr Chairmian Shepperd (Member on the County Police Committee) on the work of a recent Conference of the Gloucestershire Constabulary, run by young children. They are funding to the tune of £5000 a '**Youth Committee**' in an effort to reach Young Children including LAC's, to have a dialogue and find out their problems and exchange views.

My sincere thanks to all the Officers and Members of Gloucestershire County Council (in particular Margaret Sheather) for all their help and information in compiling this report

In the words of the Director of Social Services for Gloucestershire County Council

'I think this Committee does contribute by raising Member awareness. Their decisions are then better informed by the real needs and situations of Young People Looked After'