

E REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Recruitment

- 1 Difficulties are continuing to be experienced in recruiting social workers. Wycombe continues to be the most difficult area for recruitment with around 40% of Social Worker posts continuing to be vacant. As mentioned in my last report to the Council a market premium (an additional payment on top of normal pay) is being paid to child care social workers and other measures being implemented are - an improved Housing and Relocation Scheme, a Mortgage Subsidy scheme, an extension of the car leasing scheme and improved links with relevant colleges and universities. Guidelines for managers on the application of these initiatives have just been printed.

Working Together Conference

- 2 The Children and Young People's Portfolio organised a conference in June titled "Working together to keep our children safe in schools". This was part of the response to the independent review report on Wendover House and brought together a wide range of stakeholders. Five high quality speakers provided a very thought provoking day for an audience comprising County Councillors, school governors, headteachers, teachers and social workers.
- 3 Two workshops took place during the day. It is intended that the feedback from those sessions, together with the material from the speakers, will be fed into an action plan. This should help the County Council improve its practices in the area of staff recruitment and generally to move towards being a safer organisation.

Inter-agency working

- 4 The portfolio has a number of Flagships related to inter-agency working. Particularly important among these is one containing a number of projects intended to ensure that children at risk are more effectively protected as a result of closer collaboration between services provided by the County Council and its partner agencies. To date a number of proposals have been agreed at the Area Child Protection Committee that will lead to the development of local policies and

procedures for inter-agency working. These are now in the process of implementation.

- 5 The last of these reports to Council referred to an integrated assessment framework that had been produced to enable co-ordinated action to take place between agencies. Building upon this, a programme of joint (education and social care) inspections of educational and social services establishments has been agreed. A number of inspections have already taken place and the benefits of the joint approach are already apparent with greater emphasis being placed on care aspects as well the educational needs of the children.
- 6 Further to this, another Flagship requires that an integrated assessment procedure be put in place to enable a child centred service to be provided. A conference has taken place with partner agencies and process documents have been agreed. The procedure is now in use.

Care Leavers' Service

- 7 As young people become adults and leave care it is important to ensure that they are not isolated and participate socially and economically as citizens. In order to achieve this the Council seeks to provide support that will enable care leavers to make the transition to independent life. The 16+ Care Leavers' Service offers some supported residential accommodation with a focus on working towards independence. An outreach service is being developed, including young people's advisers, support for foster carers and supported lodgings and financial services. In addition the team is developing links and systems with other agencies to achieve the optimum outcome for care leavers. There will also be a focus for young people beyond the age of 18. There is evidence already that these initiatives are leading to more young people staying in touch with the Council after leaving care.

Social Services Inspectorate Annual Review of Performance 2000 - 2001

- 8 The SSI assesses the Council's performance annually. The most recent review has just been completed. The report identified a number of strengths in services within the portfolio as well as some weaknesses. These are detailed in the Inspector's report and in the report that my colleague the Cabinet member for Adult Social Care and I took to the Cabinet meeting on July 9th. It was encouraging that the review recognised significant progress in a number of important areas. Chief among these were the improvement in the recruitment and retention of foster carers and the quality of the adoption service.
- 9 Among the areas cited as requiring improvement were joint planning arrangements with the health authority and PCGs and more inclusive practice in schools for children in need in order to reduce exclusions. Work is underway on these and other areas requiring improvement. However, it will be important to ensure that there is a clear focus of staff and resources on these areas over the next year.

Hearing the Customer's View

- 10 Hearing the Customer's View is the statutory complaints procedure for the Social Services Department. The first annual report has just been produced although the procedure has been in place for some years. There are three levels of complaint; Stage 1 is the informal stage dealt with by staff providing the service that is the subject of the complaint, Stage 2 is a formal stage with an independent investigation and Stage 3 involves a panel of two councillors and an independent person.
- 11 Last year there were 50 complaints relating to Children and Young People with 43 being dealt with at Stage 1. This high proportion is indicative of the seriousness with which officers take these complaints and their willingness to take rapid action to talk to complainants and deal with their issues. Five cases went to Stage 2 and two to Stage 3. Of the latter group, one led to a review of policy and practice and the other was not upheld.

- 12 This procedure is clearly very important in enabling us to maintain an awareness of the level of client satisfaction. We will continue to report these statistics on a regular basis.

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