

F REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- 1 While there has been a great deal of day to day work going on within my portfolio since I last reported, no particular issues have arisen. Therefore I would like to take this opportunity to refer to two important developments that will become more important in the future. The first relates to the implications of the new care standards for children's homes.
- 2 In April 2002 the Care Standard Act 2000 will come into force which will require local authorities to apply for registration of their own homes. The National Care Standards Commission will be responsible for inspection using National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes. Enforcement action can be taken against the registered manager and the authority.
- 3 The new regulations will almost certainly have major cost implications. First, homes would have to be improved to meet building and accommodation standards. Second the regulations state that no more than 50% of staff on duty can be agency staff. This could be particularly difficult to achieve with the present difficulties of recruiting and retaining staff. Also, where only one member of staff is employed at night, the situation would clearly become impossible if only agency staff were available.
- 4 In the Children's Homes National Minimum Standards there is a clear statement that agency or other temporary staff should not be left in charge of a children's home. This is obviously an issue that needs to be resolved.
- 5 I would also like to draw members' attention to the Children and Young People's Services Planning Forum that is being developed to provide a partnership for all agencies across the area covered by Buckinghamshire County Council to help planning and co-ordination. Clearly there are a number of benefits in doing this. Joint planning should produce better outcomes, closer co-ordination should reduce chances for duplication and the needs of all children should be better served by a more synchronised focus on the needs of children,

young people, their families and carers. The Forum will include representatives from a number of organisations outside the County Council including Health, District Councils, voluntary organisations, users and carers, the Area Child Protection Committee and Connexions.

- 6 The continuing problems of recruitment and retention of staff are still causing concern. However a number of initiatives have been taken. For example, some of the medium term measures include a market premium being paid to social workers. Other measures have been put in place such as an improved Housing and Relocation Scheme, a Mortgage Subsidy scheme and an extension of the car leasing scheme for employees who undertake a high mileage on behalf of the Council. In addition stronger links are being developed with appropriate colleges and universities to directly recruit into the areas of skills shortage. I will report at a future meeting on how successful these measures have been.

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