

 CITY OF YORK COUNCIL		

Executive Member Decision Session for Children and Young People	11 January 2011
Report of the Director of Adults, Children and Education	

A Council ‘Pledge’ to Looked After Children in York

Summary

1. This report presents the work of York’s Children in Care Council known as the “Show Me That I Matter” Panel, to develop a Council Pledge to Looked After Children. The pledge describes a series of undertakings by the Council about the nature and quality of care Looked After Children in York can expect. The report will also set out how York’s Strategic Partnership for Looked After Children will ensure that the Pledge is delivered and monitored.
2. The Executive Member is asked to formally endorse the Pledge and approve the proposals for the promotion and delivery of this undertaking.

Background

3. Nationally “Care Matters” guidance outlines local authorities duties to develop a pledge or set of promises outlining the support, services and care that children and young people looked after can expect. Government guidance requires that local authorities must consult with children and young people when doing this.
4. York’s Children in Care Council, the “Show Me That I Matter” panel, were keen to play an active role in writing a pledge for Looked After Children in York and therefore set up a young people’s working group.
5. A small amount of funding was secured from the University of York (£1,200) to support the group and enable the University to carry out research into the participation of looked after children.

Young People’s Working Group

6. The young people’s working group began meeting in March 2010 to consider together what should be included in York’s Pledge. The group also considered what form this Pledge might take and how it should be promoted and distributed to all Looked After children and young people in the City.

The Approach

7. The young people's working group were particularly interested in looking at the care experiences of looked after children and focused on specific aspects of care such as parenting and the support needed for looked after children to have 'the same life chances as other children and young people in York'.
8. The group met regularly to plan the project and to agree how they could best consult with their peers across the age range.
9. The group initially focused on raising young people's awareness about the benefits of developing a pledge. They considered examples from other authorities and shared ideas about how to consult the wider group of looked after children and young people in York. In part the group were very interested to learn how the views of 'harder to reach' children and young people were considered.
10. Interviews were carried out with 35 children and young people (aged between 9-19 years) and included disabled children, young people placed out of authority, those who had experience of being cared for in a residential setting and care leavers. From the information gathered, key themes were identified and combined with the messages we already had from looked after children and young people in York (outlined in the Corporate Parenting Research, the Have Your Say consultation and the Charter written to Show Me That I Matter).
11. The group also spent time considering how the pledge should look. They recognised the importance of creating a document that is accessible to all Looked After Children in York. The group spent a lot of time and care considering how to present their work in a meaningful and child-friendly format.
12. Following extensive consultation with their peers through specially arranged events and meetings some key messages emerged:
 - The pledge should be bright, attractive, easy to read and understand and not too long.
 - It should be presented in various ways, including as a leaflet, poster and a DVD, so that it is appealing to children and young people.
13. An activity-based consultation for children and young people was organised to consult on a final draft of the pledge and thank the young people for their contribution to this important document. The event took place at Carlton Lodge and was attended by 13 children and young people, and included children's social care staff, foster carers and children and young people in care.

Presentation and Distribution

14. The young people's group decided that two versions of the Pledge should be made available, a summarised version and a full version, detailing specific promises around the care and support they require.

15. The young people wanted the full version to be available in leaflet format and the summarised version being displayed on a poster.
16. In addition and prompted by feedback from a variety of children and young people the group also decided to produce a DVD about the Pledge (including some basic information for children and young people when they first come into care) that will be distributed to all looked after children and young people.
17. The DVD and accompanying leaflet will become part of the ***Information Pack for Looked After Children*** that is distributed to children and young people when they first become looked after, to ensure that all children and young people have access to it. The Information Packs are currently being updated to reflect further the feedback and and valuable information gleaned through the consultations undertaken to develop the Pledge.
18. All publication, including the DVD, will be completed by January 2011.

Delivering and Monitoring the Pledge

19. The development of the Pledge has been supported throughout by the Strategic Partnership for Looked After Children group. This partnership group comprises senior representatives from across the multi agency network of services who support Looked After Children.
20. The partnership has met with members of the SMTIMP on several occasions to track the progress and emerging messages from the young people's working group.
21. Once the Pledge has been formally endorsed, the strategic partnership will use this information to inform and shape a refreshed strategic plan to further support improved outcomes for Looked After Children in York. Progress against this plan and in turn against the priorities described in the pledge will be monitored and reviewed regularly by the Partnership and annual report presented to the YorOK Board.

Options

22. The draft pledge has been presented to and agreed by the Strategic Partnership for Looked After Children. The Executive Member is asked to endorse this work on the basis that it will inform and shape the strategic priorities and future direction of the Council and its partners work to improve the outcomes for all Looked After Children and Young People.

Analysis

23. It is striking that the final version of this Pledge, developed by Looked After Young people for Looked After Young people focuses on those important issues central to children and young people achieving their maximum potential.

24. A review of similar work from other areas demonstrates that often projects such as this are prone to be drawn towards more peripheral issues such as 'pocket money and bedtimes' to name a few. This group however, demonstrated a maturity and thoroughness of approach that has delivered a valuable document that will undoubtedly help the Council and its partners to work together on those crucial issues that really will make a difference.
25. Put simply, the Pledge directs officers within the Council along with colleagues from across the multi agency network to focus on those issues that will improve the life chances of every looked After Child and Young Person in York

Corporate Objectives

26. Improving the outcomes for Looked After Children is a key corporate objective. The Pledge helps to shape and inform the delivery of services to this vulnerable group of children and young people.

27. Implications

- **Financial**
There are no financial implications beyond the Council's statutory responsibilities for meeting the needs of Looked After Children in York
- **Human Resources (HR)**
There are no specific HR implications although the pledge does invite the Council to consider every opportunity to secure work experience or more permanent employment within the Council.
- **Equalities**
The Pledge helps to ensure that the Council discharges its responsibilities to its Looked After Children and Young people in a manner that takes account of their specific needs. In particular, it highlights the critical importance of recognising the uniqueness of every child and young person whilst recognising their particular needs and vulnerabilities by virtue of their need to be Looked After'
- **Legal**
There are no legal implications.
- **Crime and Disorder**
There are no specific Crime and Disorder implications
- **Information Technology (IT)**
There are no specific IT implications
- **Other**
Not applicable

28. Risk Management

A failure to ensure that the care afforded to Looked After Children is not of the highest quality carries considerable financial, human, reputational and potentially legal risks. In responding positively to the opinions of young people themselves the council has an opportunity to further offset those risks.

Recommendations

29. The Executive Member is asked to endorse the Pledge to Looked After Children in York on behalf of the Council.

Reason:

This is a document that will shape and inform the strategic priorities and work to support improved outcomes for Looked After Children

Contact Details

Author:	Chief Officer Responsible for the report:					
Nikki Wilson Childrens Rights Officer Adults,Children and Education, City of York Council 01904 555617 Eoin Rush Assistant Director (Children's Specialist Services) Adults,Children and Education 01904 554212	Peter Dwyer Director Adults,Children and Education 01904 554200					
	Report Approved	✓	Date	28/12/2010		
Wards Affected: <i>List wards or tick box to indicate all</i>					All	
For further information please contact the author of the report						

Annexes

Annex 1 – The Pledge (Short Version)

Annex 2 – The Pledge (Detailed Version)