

Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee



Scrutiny Review

How the Council Contributes to the Life Chances of Looked After Children

Final Report
November 2005

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Foreword



Councillor Chris P. Franks
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Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee

I am pleased to present Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee's Report on How the Vale of Glamorgan Council contributes to the life chances of Looked After Children. The decision to scrutinise how the Council contributed to improving the life chances of Looked After Children was taken following member engagement that highlighted this as a key priority for the Council and Government.

As corporate parents (all Members and officers of the Council) need to be concerned about Looked After Children as if they were their own children. This concern includes their education, health and welfare, what they do in their leisure time and holidays, how they celebrate their culture and how they receive praise and encouragement for their achievements.

Throughout the review, the Council's corporate priority "to provide high quality, accessible learning opportunities which meets the needs of all ages and to develop and promote a culture of lifelong learning for all"; and "to make the Vale a safe, healthy and enjoyable place in which individuals, children and families can live their lives to the full" was paramount.

The review considered the support currently in place to improve the life chances of children within its care. This is principally provided through the Council's Learning and Development and Community Services Directorates; and through the support the Council receives from its partners in the Voluntary Sector. Existing notable practice implemented by other councils was considered and informed the review and its recommendations.

I would like to thank the officers that contributed to the review for providing their full help and assistance and my colleagues on the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee for the effective way in which they have carried out their discussions with officers on what has proved to be a positive first review for this Committee.

I hope that Members and the public will be reassured by this report and the recommendations of this Scrutiny Committee.

Executive Summary

The Council has provided briefings, guidance and development opportunities for Members and school governors in respect of the education of Looked After Children (LAC).

The Council performs well against performance indicators when compared to all-Wales. However, while the educational attainment of Vale LAC is above the all-Wales average, it is currently below the average attainment of all-Vale children at SATS and GCSE.

The number of LAC varies from week to week; at the beginning of September 2005 the Council was responsible for 192 LAC, a reduction of 10.7% from the peak of 215 in 2001/02 and below the all-Wales average of 196 at March 2004. The SSPMT and Children First breakdown of LAC placements in mid-September 2005 accounted for approximately 175 LAC of which between 64 and 66% were placed in the Vale. 2004 mid-year estimates indicate that LAC represent 0.68% of all children aged 0 to 19 years of age. The gender of LAC at March 2004 was 54% male 46% female. LAC attendance levels, fixed-term and permanent exclusions compares well against the levels for all children. 21 LAC had a statement of Special Education Needs (SEN) this represents 4.5% of the Vale's stated population. Comprehensive reporting of LAC statistics to the Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee is in place; however, the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee receives little LAC specific performance information in terms of the wider issues that can impact on educational attainment.

The Personal Education Plan (PEP) is a crucial support to the educational attainment of LAC; it sets out their needs, targets and provides a valuable progress monitoring mechanism. Compliance with PEP targets has been an area of poor performance. On 31st March 2005 11.3% (9 of 80) PEPs were in place within prescribed timescales. The introduction of designated teachers to fulfil the LAC coordinators role in every school complies with guidance. Co-ordinators are briefed and trained in LAC issues and understanding of PEPs by the Children First Team. Some older LAC are reported to view PEPs as intrusive and at conflict with their desire to be treated the same as other pupils. However, the roles and responsibilities with regard to the completion of the PEP do not appear to be consistently understood or interpreted by all parties.

The placement strategy has helped to reduce the overall number of 'child weeks' spent in care. It supports improved educational attainment of LAC through more LAC placed within the Vale, and through better-supported foster carers, respite care and enhanced community based family support services to increase the prospect of children remaining with their families. Other interventions support the strategy for example in 2004/05 the First Contact team averted accommodation for 28 children/young people.

The Vale has increasing numbers of registered Foster Carers and has implemented recruitment initiatives to continue this expansion to support the requirements of the Placement Strategy. Foster carer basic task descriptions are in place for 4-levels of carer and are linked to the appraisal system and remuneration; all task descriptions promote the educational attainment of LAC. Foster carer training and development opportunities have improved over the past 2 years. The Foster Carers Forum (FCF) has promoted improvements in foster carer support and standards. The independent Foster Panel provides a quality assurance element to the provision of foster care through the carer annual appraisal system. Targets for the completion of carer annual reviews have not been met over the past 2 years.

The Leaving Care Team provides support, clear information and guidance to young people about to leave care. 100% of LAC had a Pathway Plan in place on their 16th birthday. There are many examples of the team working with other agencies in the Vale to enhance accommodation options, literacy and numeracy levels, and careers and job prospects.

Cymorth provides funding to improve the life chances of children and young people from disadvantaged families. It works in partnership integrating with and adding value to mainstream services, and is based on early preventative intervention. It builds on previous initiatives such as Sure Start. Many voluntary bodies provide important support to LAC in terms of accommodation, advocacy, careers and education both when in care and when leaving care. Much of this work is jointly funded and in partnership with the Council, adding capacity, resilience and expertise to Council services.

The multi-agency Children First Team is well respected and valued by Council services, schools and other bodies that provide support to LAC. However the Children First initiative will lose its health focus this autumn as a result of funding issues.

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Introduction

1. A key role for Scrutiny Committees is to help improve the Council's performance through monitoring and review. It achieves this by looking at the Cabinet decisions, helping to develop emerging policies and monitoring performance of the existing policies / strategies and services of the Council to ensure that they remain relevant and meet the changing needs of the community of the Vale of Glamorgan. The Scrutiny process provides opportunities for non-Executive Members of the Council to examine the services provided, and to ask questions on how decisions have been made, to consider whether service improvements can or should be put in place and to make recommendations. Scrutiny Committees report annually to Full Council on their workings and make recommendations for future work programmes. The 2005/2006 Lifelong Learning Scrutiny work programme included a review of "The Education of Looked After Children". The review scope required that this review evaluated how the Council through its Education Service contributes to improve the life chances of Looked After Children (LAC).

Looked After Children - Legislative and Statutory Summary

2. The term 'looked after' was introduced by the Children Act 1989, and refers to children who are subject to care orders and those who are accommodated under Section 20 of the Act. Children may be accommodated for a short or long period on a temporary or permanent basis. No court proceedings are involved, the Council looks after these children by agreement with, or at the request of parents; the parents retain full parental responsibility. Being accommodated is a voluntary arrangement that can be terminated by the parents at any time.
3. Section 31 of the Act enables a court to make a Care Order. To do this the court must be satisfied that either the child "is suffering, or likely to suffer significant harm" which results from care given to the child, or that the child is beyond parental control. If a Care Order is in place the Council shares parental responsibility with child's parents, however, where it is in the child's interest the Council may limit the parents "parental responsibility". Unless revoked the Care Order remains in force until the young person is 18.
4. It is essential that school staff know who has parental responsibility for the child. 'Parental Responsibility' is defined as 'all rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority which by law a parent has in relation to the child and the people who must be consulted when any decisions are to be made'.
5. The National Assembly for Wales (NAfW) circular 2/2001, guidance on the education of children looked after by local authorities provides that:
 - Every LAC should have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) in order to guarantee access to services and support, contribute to stability, minimise disruption and broken schooling, clarify special needs, establish clear goals and to act as a record of the progress and achievement.
 - All schools should designate a teacher to act as a resource and advocate for LAC.
 - Every local authority has a duty to establish and maintain a system to ensure the sharing of relevant information about care, placements and education.
 - Care placements should not be made unless an appropriate level of education will be provided (other than when a child is clearly at risk of significant harm).
 - Local authorities should secure a suitable education placement for a LAC within 20 school days after the child becomes looked after.

6. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, requires that the local authority provides a personal adviser and a Pathway Plan for all young people in care aged between 16-17 years. The role of the adviser is to guide young people in care through the process of leaving care; prevent them from dropping out of formal education, training or employment, provide support for young people engaged in education or training until the age of 24 and to replicate the responsibility of any good parent in the general population

National Situation

7. The Government's long-term policy objective is to ensure that every child in care is able to fulfil his or her potential. The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) examined the barriers that prevent LAC achieving their educational potential, and is quoted in the school governors' guide. It identifies that many children in care enjoy school, and almost all think it is important; but as a group they have poor experiences of education and very low educational attainment. Some key national statistics from 2001/02 indicated that:

- at any one time, around 60,000 children are in care;
- 41% of children in care were under 11 years of age;
- 80% of children entering care do so because of abuse or neglect, or for family reasons;
- less than 10% enter care because of their own behaviour;
- 67% live in foster care and 10% live in children's homes;
- 25% of children in care live outside their 'home' local authority;
- 8% of children in care achieved 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE, compared to 50% of all young people;
- children in care have poor results in Key Stage tests at age 7, 11 and 14.
- 2% of children enter care having had negative contact with the police;
- 1% of children in care go to university.

8. Guidance from the National Assembly for Wales (NAfW) informs that children become looked after for a variety of reasons. Many are affected by distressing and damaging experiences, including physical or sexual abuse and neglect. Some will be looked after because of the illness or death of a parent, or because their families are in some way unable to provide adequate care for them. The majority of looked after children come from families who experience hardship and are separated from them because of some form of family upheaval or breakdown.

9. Whilst some care leavers go on to be successful later in life; many have poor experiences of education and care, which contributes to later social exclusion, for example research indicates that:

- 25% to 33% of rough sleepers were in care;
- young people who have been in care are two and a half times more likely to be teenage parents;
- around 25% of adults in prison spent some time in care as children.

LAC and Strategic Links

10. The Vale of Glamorgan Council has two main Corporate Priorities that link to LAC:

‘To provide high quality, accessible learning opportunities which meet the needs of learners of all ages and to develop and promote a culture of lifelong learning for all.’

‘To make the Vale a safe, healthy and enjoyable place in which individuals, children and families can live their lives to the full.’

11. In relation to the educational attainment of LAC the Council, in its Corporate Plan, has set the ambitious target that by 2009 the Council will “Ensure Looked After Children achieve no less than the average attainment of children from similar backgrounds living in their area”. The Council through its Learning and Development Directorate and its Community Services Directorate aims to improve the life chances of all children. In relation to LAC the Council provides direct support and contributes to multi-agency initiatives. Raising educational standards and tackling underachievement of LAC is a key objective of the Education Strategic Plan. The “Access and Inclusion” Service Plan identifies the following service objectives:
 - i Ensure an appropriate education for age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs.
 - ii Offset disadvantage and maximise potential.
 - iii Maximise attendance and minimise school exclusions.
 - iv Prudently manage out of county placements & SEN Budget.
 - v Ensure the educational needs of Looked After Children are met and to maximise educational attainment.
12. The Children Services Service Plan has the following service objectives that link to LAC:
 - i To ensure that children maintain and develop secure and appropriate attachments.
 - ii To ensure children are safe.
 - iii To maximise the life chances of children.
 - iv To assess the needs of children and their carers quickly and fairly.
 - v To ensure children and their carers are actively involved in planning.
 - vi To ensure we provide services of quality and value.
 - vii To promote the effectiveness of the Council as a Corporate Parent and deliver the Council’s 4 objectives in respect of LAC:
 - a) Reduce the need for children to be looked after by the local authority
 - b) Reduce the overall number of children within the Looked After system
 - c) Improve the capacity of the Council to meet the needs of those children it looks after by means of cost effective local provision
 - d) Reduce the Council’s reliance on externally purchased residential care.

Performance Analysis

13. The following is a summary of children in care in Wales’ statistics. The sources include:
 - SWIFT Database and Social Services Performance Management Team (SSPMT).
 - Personal Social Services Statistics Wales 2004
 - National Assembly of Wales Indicators
 - Local Government Data Unit (LGDU) Statistics 2003/04

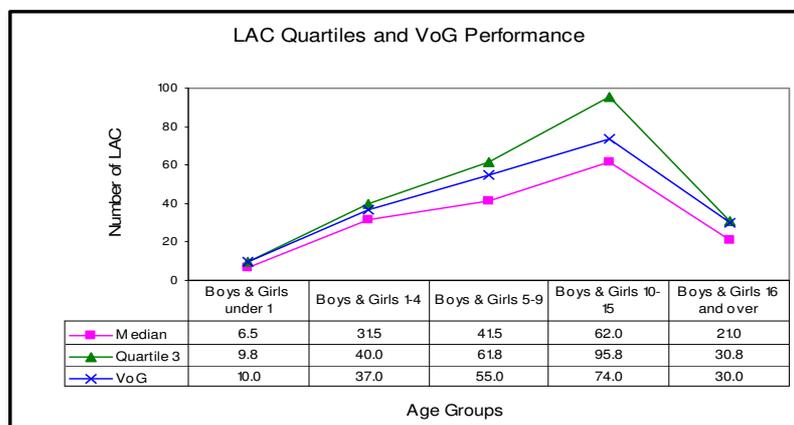
14. Direct performance comparisons from one year to another for LAC can be difficult due to the variations that occur from one cohort to another and the relatively small numbers can be skewed by the impact of a small number of individuals.
15. At the beginning of September 2005 there were 192 LAC in the Vale a reduction of 23 (10.7%) from the peak of 215 in 2001/02. LGDU figures indicate that the percentage of male (54%) and female (46%) LAC for all Wales during 2003/04 reflects the ratio within the Vale. Across Wales there were 4,315 LAC; of this total 1,992 were female and 2,323 male. Within the Vale there were a total of 206 LAC with 94 female and 112 male. Mid-year estimates indicate that LAC represented 0.64% (2003) and 0.68% (2004) of all children aged 0 – 19.

Percentage of LAC by Age Group 2003/04 (LGDU)

Age Group	Wales Average Numbers	Wales Average %	Vale of Glamorgan Numbers	Vale of Glamorgan %
Under 1 year old	7.5	3.8%	10	4.9%
1 and 4 years old	35.2	17.9%	37	18.0%
5 and 9 years old	50.0	25.5%	55	26.7%
10 and 15 years old	79.2	40.4%	74	35.9%
Aged 16 and over	24.3	12.4%	30	14.6%
Total	196.1		206	

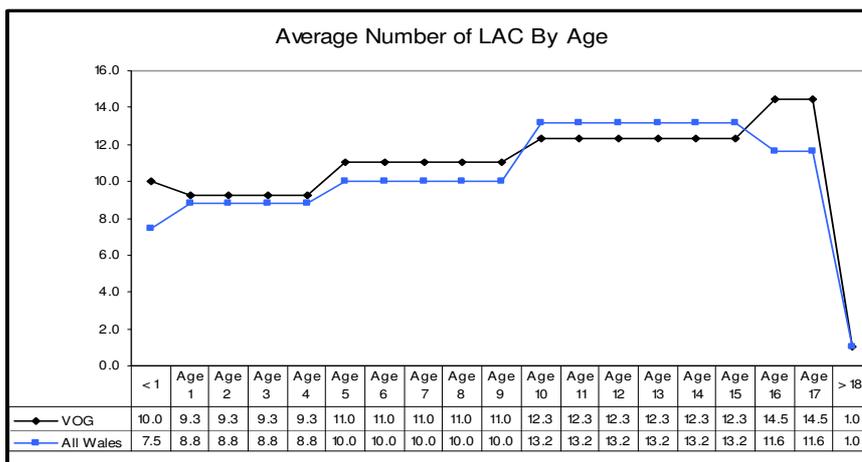
16. The table above groups LAC in uneven age ranges i.e. the first age group includes only children under 1 years of age whereas the other age groups include the total number of children from a number of age groups. Data presented in this form makes effective comparison difficult, but shows that the Vale has a higher number and percentage of LAC than the Wales average in each age category except the 10 - 15 years old group.

Numbers of LAC by Age Group (LGDU)



17. The above chart provides a comparison for 2003/04, of the Council's LAC by age group against the all-Wales performance; better performance is a low figure. The Vale is positioned between the median and the upper quartile values except for the 'under 1' and '16 and over' categories where our performance is at the upper quartile values.
18. Research supports the premise that the life chances of LAC are enhanced where they have a stable environment preferably within their family unit. The Council's aim is to better manage the numbers of LAC from the 2001-02 peak of 215 through its Placement Strategy (2003-07).

Comparison of the numbers of LAC per age year (LGDU)



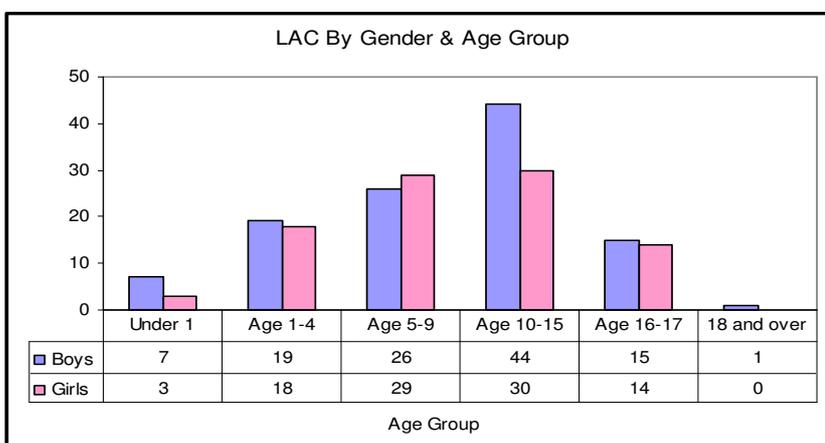
19. The chart above relates to LGDU data for March 2004. The chart divides the age groups by the number of years in each age group to compare an average figure per year for each age group. Children enter the care system between 0-15 years, while some will be temporarily in care, research indicates, those in care for 6-weeks, tend to remain in care.
20. The above table shows a progressive increase year-on-year that supports this research. The comparison shows for each age the Vale of Glamorgan is above the all-Wales figure except for the age years 10 to 15; thereafter the number of LAC peak at 14.5 and is again higher than the all-Wales figure of 11.6.

Percentage of LAC by Ethnic Origin (LGDU)

Ethnic Origin	Wales Average		Vale of Glamorgan	
White	86.9%	3751	95.6%	197
Mixed racial background	2.7%	117	3.4%	7
Asian or Asian British	0.5%	20	0.0%	0
Black or Black British	0.6%	28	0.0%	0
From other ethnic groups	0.8%	35	1.0%	2
Unknown ethnic origin	8.4%	364	0.0%	0

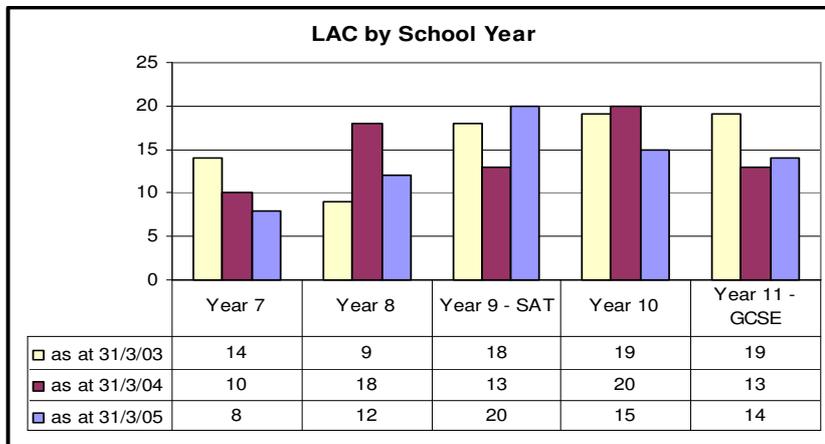
21. The table above relates to March 2004, the majority of Vale of Glamorgan LAC were of white ethnic origin; no LAC were from Asian or Black ethnic groups. The white:ethnic ratio of LAC reflects that of the overall population.

The Number of LAC by Gender and Age Group (LGDU)



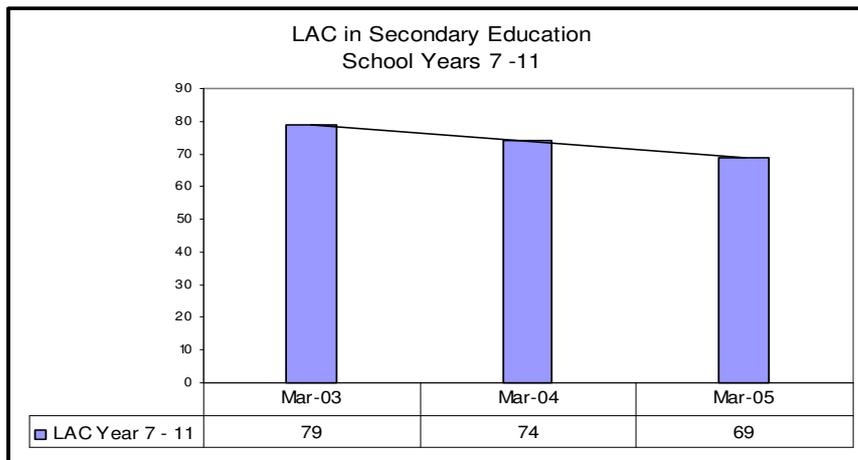
22. The LGDU figures by gender for the Vale at the 31st March 2004 are presented in the chart above. The figures show that within the Vale 206 children were looked after, with 112 (54%) boys and 94 (46%) girls. This gender proportion is the same as for all-Wales.

The Number of LAC by School Year



23. The SSPMT provided the three-year figures for the above chart. The total LAC in secondary education demonstrates a reducing trend over the three years from 2003 to 2005 and is presented in the chart below.

LAC in Secondary Education



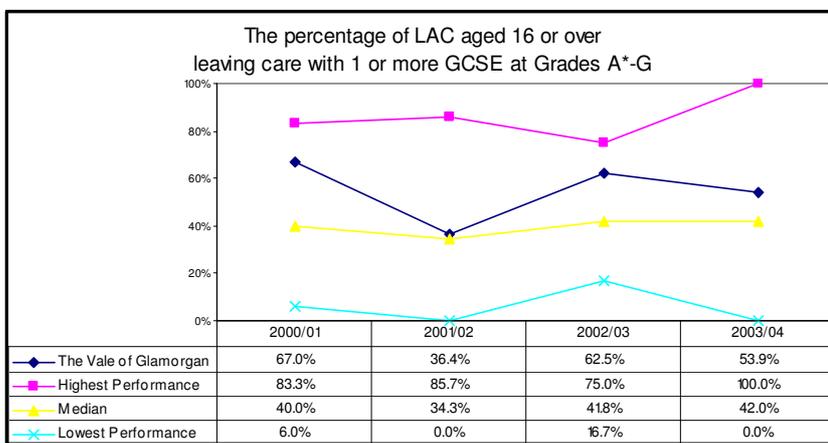
The Number of LAC Placements Within and Outside of the Vale of Glamorgan

Placements Within and Outside of the Vale	In Vale	Out Vale
Fostering	96	45
Homes & Hostels / supportive residential accommodation	1	5
Placed with own Parents	13	3
Independent Living	1	0
Residential Care Home	0	4
NHS/Health	0	2
Family Centre / Mother & Baby Unit	0	1
Young Offender Institution / Prison	0	1
School not dual registered as a home	1	2
Sub Totals	112	63

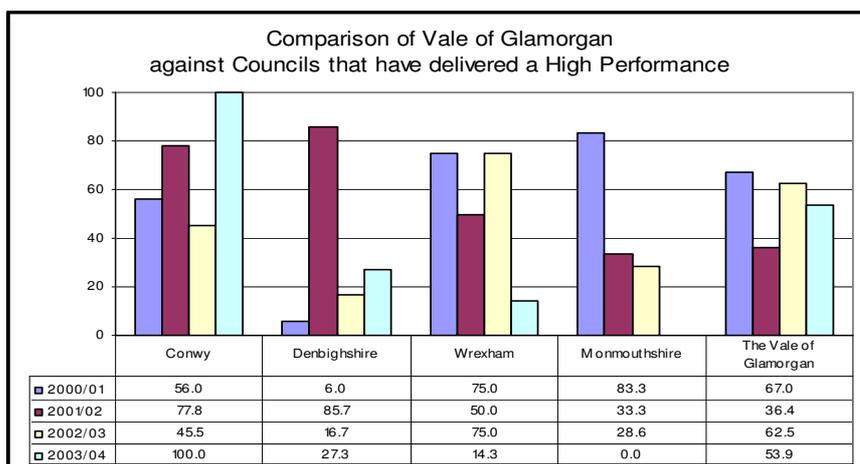
24. The above table presents SSPMT figures for September 2005 but excludes 18 children placed for adoption. Of the 175 LAC 36% were placed outside of the Vale. Children

First records for the same period indicate that of 174 LAC 34% (59 out of 174) were placed outside of the Vale. The Children First team advise that more educational challenges face LAC placed outside of the Vale. Experience to date evidences our LAC are better supported by the Council's LEA and schools than those that depend on other Council's provision. The record reconciliation should be improved to provide more accurate and timely information.

NAWPI 3.2a



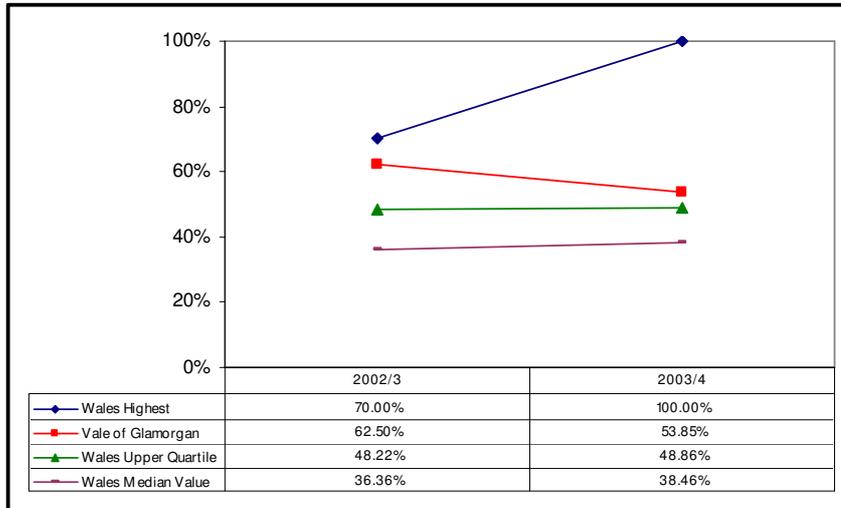
25. The GCSE educational qualifications of LAC are monitored through NAWPI 3.2 (a & b). The above chart shows the performance trends (LGDU) over the 4 academic years to 2003/04.
26. The performance varied over the period but the Council remained above the top quartile value for both 2002/03 (51.97%) and 2003/04 (52.89%). Provisional figures for 2004/05 indicate a Council performance of 42.9%. At this time there are no all-Wales figures against which to compare. The Council did not achieve the highest performance for any year but consistently performs above the Wales median value.



27. A further analysis of the Vale with those Councils that performed the best in terms of NAWPI 3.2a in each one of the 4 academic years is presented in the chart above. Each Council's performance varies over the period; only Conwy and the Vale perform above the Wales median value year on year.
28. All councils performance is measured against what is frequently a very small cohort. It has been as few as one LAC eligible to take examinations. This variation in performance is reflected in the table above. Against this context the performance range for the Vale of Glamorgan is fairly stable at 36% to 67% (31) whilst the Conwy range is from 46% to 100% (54), the Wrexham range is from 14% to 75% (61), the

Denbighshire range is from 6% to 86% (80), and the Monmouthshire range is from 0% to 83% (83).

NAWPI 3.2b



29. NAWPI 3.2b refers to the percentage of LAC aged 16 or over, leaving care, with 2 or more GCSEs at grades A*-G or GNVQ. The Council's performance is above the top quartile value for both years where figures were available. The provisional Council performance for 2004/5 is 38.1%; at this time all-Wales figures against which to compare this performance are not available.

30. The key stage SATs and GCSE results for the academic year 2003/04 are presented in the table below.

SATs Key Stages	Academic Year 2003/4		
	Number of LAC	Percentage Achieving	
		LAC	All Children
Key Stage 1 (Age 7) achieve level 2 or above	7 (2)	28.6%	No NAWPI
Key Stage 2 (Age 10/11) achieving level 4 or above	7 (5)	71.4%	Maths 84.07% English 85.67% Welsh 85.52% Science 95.20%
Key Stage 3 (Age 14) achieving level 3 or above	9 (2)	22.2%	Maths 74.19% English 69.61% Welsh 82.26% Science 78.09%
GCSE A*-C in Maths, Science & English/Welsh	7 (0)	0.0%	44.82%
GCSE A*-G age 18/19 (1 or more)	21 (9)	42.9%	(NAWPI 2.3) 94.79%
Number of LAC leaving care with at least 1 entry level qualification or higher (NAWPI 2.7)	21 (15)	71.4%	(NAWPI 2.7) 98.09%

31. Comparison with all children at Key Stage 2 and 3 for 2003/04 is made with Children First records for LAC and NAWPI 2.4 and 2.5 for all children. The NAWPI figures are taken from the Improvement Plan 2005/06 as reported for 2004/05 (which relate to the academic year 2003/04). The figure for NAWPI 2.7 is calculated from the reported figures i.e. 98.09% achieve, therefore 1.91% of all 15/16 year olds leave full-time education without a recognised qualification. As can be seen there is a considerable difference between the attainments of LAC against that of all children.

Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

32. The NAW's circular 2/2001 requires that a PEP is in place within 20 days of a LAC first coming into care, or moving school. At 31st March 2005 within the Vale of Glamorgan 80 children entered care or joined a new school, of these 9 (11.3%) had a PEP within

the prescribed time-scales. In the previous year 8 LAC had a PEP within the timescales.

School attendance and exclusion levels

LAC School Attendance & Exclusions	LAC Academic Year 2003/04	All Children Academic Year 2003/04
School attendance levels of Primary children	94.0%	94.6%
School attendance levels of Secondary children	93.6%	91.6%

33. SSPMT attendance figures for LAC relate to the 2003/04 academic year; figures were not available for previous academic years. Primary Schools LAC attendance levels were very close to those figures for all children. Secondary School LAC attendance (93.6%) is better than that reported for all children (91.6%), however, the Secondary total included 13 of 53 LAC placed in residential establishments and hospitals, where attendance is generally good.

Exclusions

Long-Term LAC	Academic Year 2002/03	Academic Year 2003/04
Average number of days of fixed-term exclusions	9	5
Permanently Excluded	0	0

34. The SSPMT figures in relation to long-term LAC that were excluded are provided above. The average of 5-days of fixed term exclusions for 2003/04 relates to 4 LAC, for the same year the rate for all children was 7-days. For the academic years 2002/03 and 2003/04 there were no permanent exclusions for LAC.

LAC with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

1	<i>The number of LAC at School Action</i>	45
2	<i>The number of LAC at School Action Plus</i>	21
3	<i>The number of LAC with statements of SEN</i>	21

35. The SEN Code of Practice for Wales describes 3 levels of intervention for children with SEN. The Pupil Support Service provides specialist assessment and advice at School Action Plus, and manages statutory assessments and the review of resulting statements of SEN. Within the Vale 467 children have statements of SEN; of these 21 (4.5%) are LAC.

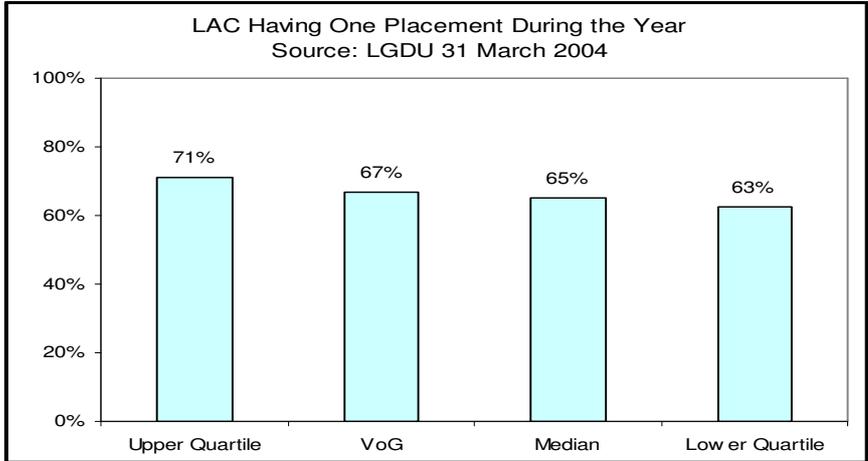
LAC Placements (LGDU)

	With Parents or Family	Foster Placements	Placed for Adoption	L.A. Homes	Private / Voluntary Registered Homes	Living Independently	Absent, other	Total
Vale of Glamorgan	31 (15%)	127 (62%)	16 (8%)	9(4%)	3(2%)	7(3%)	13(6%)	206
Wales	579(13%)	3,075(71%)	231(5%)	243(6%)	34(1%)	46(1%)	107(3%)	4,315

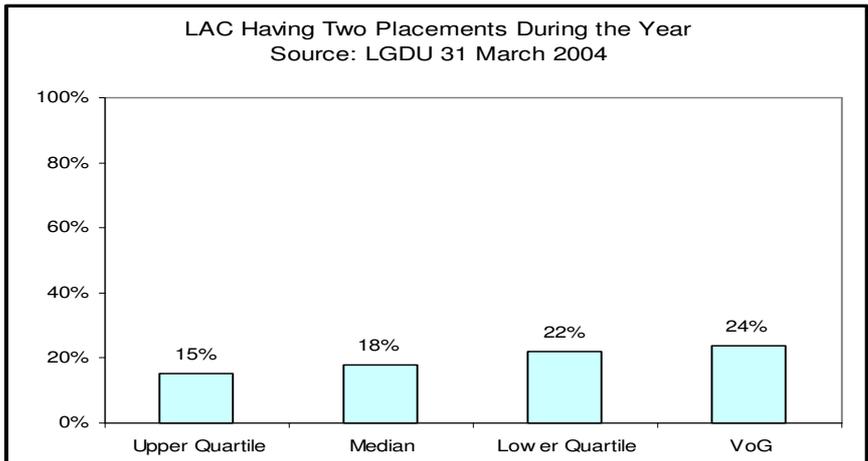
36. The above table shows that at 31st March 2004, the greatest proportion of placements both in the Vale (62%) and Wales (71%) is with Foster Placements. SSPMT figures for September 2005 indicate a total of 141 LAC were fostered of which 96 were placed within the Vale and 45 outside of the Vale.
37. Once adopted a child is not included as 'looked after'. Children living independently are those having reached the age of 16 that choose to live in their own accommodation; this is generally arranged through the Council's Housing Service or Llamau.

LAC the percentage by number of placements experienced

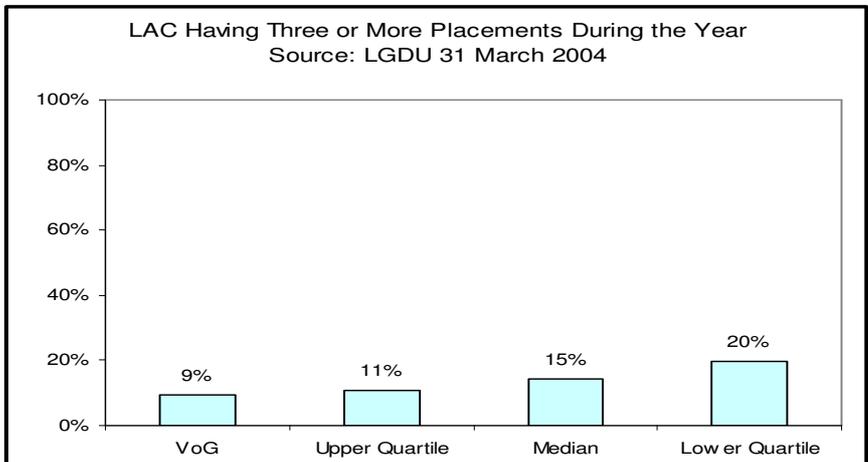
38. Government research confirms a lack of stability is a barrier to educational achievement. More than one placement for a LAC contributes to decreased stability.



39. In the chart above a high percentage represents better performance. The Vale maintains one placement per year for 67% (138 LAC), this places the Vale 9th in Wales with a performance between the Wales medium and the top quartile values.



40. In the chart above a high percentage represents poor performance. The Vale of Glamorgan performance is poor with 24% (49) LAC that experience two placements in a year and positions the Council below the lower quartile and 20th in Wales.



41. The above chart relates to the least stable placement scenario for LAC. The Council performs well against this criterion, however 9% (19 LAC) still have to contend with more than 3 placements in a year. The Vale performance is the fourth best in Wales and is inside of the WAG target of no more than 10% of LAC to have more than 3 placements in a year. This performance further improved to 8.33% for 2004/05 (Improvement Plan).
42. A further indicator of stability is the number of school changes experienced. For 2004/05 16.6% of LAC experienced one or more school changes that were not due to transitional arrangements; this is now a Policy Agreement indicator with a target of 10% by 2006/07. Children First reports that 24 changes of school occurred that were not due to transitional arrangements; however no all-Wales comparative information is available.
43. Should the LAC be placed outside of the Vale the provision of education has presented greater challenges to the LAC and the Council.

Foster Carers/Homes

44. As of August 2005 there were 84 registered Vale of Glamorgan foster homes; this is the highest number for many years.

LAC leaving care

Number of Children Leaving Care	Academic Year 2001/02	Academic Year 2002/03	Academic Year 2003/04
LAC aged 16-17	30	34	23
LAC aged 17-18	0	0	0

45. The number of LAC leaving care is reported above, 100% of eligible young people had a pathway plan for the continuing care.

Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

46. The PEP is an integral part of the Child's Care Plan and is intended as the overarching education plan that makes reference to all other education plans e.g. IEP, PSP, and Carers Action Plan etc. The PEP is a multi-agency planning mechanism, encouraging dialogue between social workers and schools and underlines the importance attached to the pupil's education. It provides an accurate educational record during the child's time in public care. The PEP has to be set up within 20 school days of entering care or joining a new school. Normally the PEP should be reviewed with the Care Plan.
47. It is the responsibility of the child's social worker to instigate the educational planning process. The trigger for the instigation of the PEP is the Child's Care Plan, which demands a current PEP.
48. The responsibility to formulate the PEP is held jointly between the school and the child's social worker. It is expected that the child and the child's parent or carer be fully consulted in the development of the PEP. The group of people involved in the PEP should identify one lead person to co-ordinate the implementation of the PEP. It is the designated teacher's responsibility to ensure that PEPs exist for all LAC in their school, ensuring that a lead person is clearly identified (e.g. form tutor/class teacher) for the formulation of each PEP.
49. A small sample of teachers' views identified the following issues around PEP completion:
 - Most problems and disruption occur when Councils other than the Vale are involved and/or there is change in Social Worker, this is disruptive for both the LAC and PEP.

- LAC feel the PEP review is intrusive and makes them different from the other pupils and conflicts with their desire to be treated the same as other pupils. There is reluctance, especially amongst LAC in secondary education to complete the 'My Contribution' section of the PEP.
- Roles and responsibilities within the PEP process are not always clear to all parties and meetings can be difficult to set up and are often cancelled by social services because of their heavy caseload. There is low ownership of PEP reviews and little appreciation of their value to stakeholders.

Elected Members Role

50. The Council as a whole is the "corporate parent"; all Members have a basic level of responsibility for the children in the Council's care. Mechanisms are in place to provide councillors with accurate information to inform them of the issues faced by LAC in the Vale. Councillors have a key role to play in ensuring that the children in their care are able to thrive. LAC will usually already have faced many challenges and will need the help of powerful adults who have a responsibility to act as corporate parents. Members should seek to ensure that provision of other public services used or needed by LAC and young people is high quality, "joined-up" and takes account of their needs. Also, as corporate parents Members should be satisfied that there is a joined up, effective and holistic approach to meeting looked after children's needs through the Council services and planning arrangements. As corporate parents (all Members and officers of the Council) need to be concerned about LAC as if they were their own. This concern includes their education, health and welfare, what they do in their leisure time and holidays, how they celebrate their culture and how they receive praise and encouragement for their achievements.
51. The Council has provided briefings and development opportunities for Members e.g. a Corporate Parenting Pack for Members and in January 2005 a Corporate Parenting course. The Council has adopted Corporate Parenting Panel terms of reference. The scrutiny committees receive information on LAC however this is largely reported to the Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee. Performance management arrangements ensure that Scrutiny Committees monitor key LAC performance indicators every quarter. Cabinet receives reports every 2-months on progress with the placement strategy. The Council's Corporate Parenting Panel receive LAC progress and success updates. The Foster Panel membership includes two Councillors.

Placement Strategy

52. The Council's 4 priorities in developing a strategic approach are:
- Reduce the need for children to be looked after by the Council.
 - Reduce the overall number of children within the looked after system.
 - Improve the capacity of the Council to meet the needs of those children it looks after by means of cost effective local provision.
 - Reduce the Council's reliance on externally purchased residential care.

The shift of resources to more preventative work has helped to address issues before an entrenched problem develops e.g. interventions by Sure Start are effective and has helped to reduce LAC placements.

53. The Children's Services Division created a new post and appointed a Principal Officer Placements and Permanency as the resource gatekeeper in relation to LAC placements, this appointee has a twofold role firstly to ensure that no child is placed on a looked after basis without an effective Care Plan and secondly to develop and

facilitate the implementation of a Permanency Policy. A single-door placement service is established, placement decisions are now centralised through this designated officer. If a child cannot be maintained in the birth parents home and a placement must be made the child will preferably be placed with the extended family or a Vale Foster Parent. If this is not possible, an Agency Foster Carer will be sought. Only in cases where it is necessary will other placement types be considered for example residential units, mother and baby units, Secure Units etc. Should a residential placement be required, the Council has a contract in place with a provider within Wales that has a 3-bed provision. National research and evidence within the Vale supports the view that the home LEA and schools will better support placements.

54. To date the placement strategy has helped to reduce the overall number of 'child weeks' spent in care. Stability and educational attainment of LAC should be enhanced by provision that facilitates more and better-supported foster carers, respite care and enhanced community based family support services to increase the prospect of children remaining with their families. The strategy will support improved educational attainment of LAC, as the Council should place more LAC within the Vale. Further, the concept of, and focus by, the Council on permanence, typically through adoption, will reduce the numbers of children in care enabling the Council to offer improved local stability and enhanced educational opportunities to those children that remain in care.

First Contact Team

55. A social work fieldworker assesses each referral on a case-by-case basis. All referral cases do not necessarily become a LAC; the Council's aim is to reduce the number of children in care.
56. The first contact team decide whether to take no further action, recommend family support through a social worker for a brief period of time or to recommend in-house (internal) fostering where vacancies exist or externally purchased foster or residential care. In 2004/05 the First Contact team averted accommodation for 28 children/young people.

Fieldwork Teams

57. Fieldwork Team duties are informed by the Children Act 1989. The first contact team processes enquiries and referrals relating to a child's welfare. If appropriate this is passed to the fieldwork team to co-ordinate the longer-term work.
58. A new LAC, or an existing LAC who has changed school should have a PEP within 20 school days. This requirement has been in place for 2-years and involves collaboration between schools (teachers/LAC co-ordinator), fieldwork team, social workers etc. The PEP is designed to bring the educational needs of the individual LAC into focus and to ensure their educational attainment is enhanced.
59. The team has a duty to ensure LAC attend school. In relation to attendance a protocol between the Pupil Support Service and Children Services regarding the provision of transport for LAC where they are placed some distance from their school is in place.
60. Where the school route at Key Stage 4 is no longer possible the fieldwork team, Children First, Social Worker and Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) liaise with alternative curriculum providers such as Amelia Trust Farm, Penarth Info Shop, Chamber Training, Imtec and Itec to meet the educational needs of the LAC.

Childcare Plan Review

61. The Child Protection and LAC Reviewing Unit now has a full complement of directly and permanently employed Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO). This has enabled the unit manager to allocate each IRO a caseload to ensure continuity for LAC and

other (e.g. CP/Pathway) reviews. The enhanced QA role of the Principal Officer Child Protection and LAC Reviewing, provides to the Director a quarterly report of the overall compliance of the service with the LAC regulations and provides due consideration to the effectiveness of meeting their educational needs.

62. The Child Care Management Team (CCMT) undertakes an annual audit of LAC Care Plans and Reviews. The audit suggested an improving picture in terms of the attention paid to standards of care and respect for individual needs and circumstances. As reported in the Improvement Plan 2005/06, nearly all LAC had care plans in place at the start of their placement (NAWPI 3.4/PA12a). First quarter results (2005/06) indicate the same level of performance. This represents good practice and is well above the all-Wales average. Plans for permanence (due at the 4-month review) are in place for over half of LAC, the Council has agreed targets (PA12b) with the NAW to increase this to 100% by 2007.
63. The first LAC Childcare Plan review is initiated within 4 weeks of coming into care; further reviews occur 3 and 6 months after coming into care, and every 6 months thereafter. Those present may include:
- School (LAC co-ordinator)
 - Children First
 - Social worker
 - Foster carer if possible
 - Parents (if appropriate)
 - Educational psychologist
 - Doctors (if required)
 - Educational Welfare Officer (if required)
64. Teachers are invited to statutory reviews every 6 months. Prior to each statutory review meeting, the Chairperson should be provided with a copy of the PEP. As required by the Care Plan the fieldworker is responsible for instigating the PEP and is jointly responsible with the school for its formulation within the designated 20 school days. Before the PEP review a briefing session takes place between the social worker and the LAC co-ordinator. It is sometimes difficult to get the older LAC to attend the review meetings; carers generally attend.
65. When sending written invitations to foster carers and external individuals for additional meetings it is reported that the use of second-class post has led to mail problems. Fieldworkers report that most teachers update the PEP themselves, however the social worker can provide the teacher with support if needed. The PEP review sheet facilitates recording additional provision required by the LAC and updated targets, and is informed by those in attendance.
67. An IEP is a document of additional needs or help needed to assist in the child's education. A child with special educational needs may have an IEP at School Action, School Action Plus or when LAC have a statement of SEN. The IEP should include information about the short-term targets set for the child; teaching strategies to be used; provision to be put in place; next plan review; success and/or exit criteria; and outcomes (to be recorded when IEP is reviewed). Needs identified in an IEP are actioned by the school. If an IEP applies to a LAC it is recorded on the PEP and raised at PEP reviews. During the assessment and statement process foster carers contribute information.
68. The majority of paperwork needs to be completed manually, as Swift does not have the capacity to produce the required documents. A new integrated Children's Services System (ICS) will standardise the approach and reduce the number of forms that need to be completed. Swift would still support this system as the underlying system. The NAW require the ICS system to be live across all of Wales by the 31st December 2006.

Schools and Governors

69. The NAFW's guidance 2/2001 sets out the Assembly's expectations. Responsibilities, roles and duties for governing bodies, governors and designated teachers are listed in the Council's 'The Education Of Looked After Children – A Guide For School Governors'.

Schools

70. Schools provide educational support to LAC through plans such as the IEP, Pastoral Support Plan (PSP) but the key plan is the PEP. The PEP should be completed within 20 school days of the LAC entering care or joining a new school.
71. The NAFW requires that all schools designate a teacher to be responsible for LAC with sufficient authority to influence school policy and practice. Within the Vale 100% of schools comply with this requirement. Schools receive training for designated LAC teacher coordinators from the Children First Team. The school has a duty to write a policy on the education of LAC, the Vale complies with all schools adopting the Vale's corporate terms of reference/policy.

Governing Bodies

72. The Governing Body should ensure that LAC have the same rights as other pupils in respect of their admission to school, the National Curriculum, public examinations, extra curricular activities, work experience and career guidance and additional educational support where needed. There is no requirement for a governing body to have a nominated governor for LAC. Whilst every Vale School has a designated Governor for Child Protection there are no governors specifically designated for LAC. The Council has established governor support and guidance in respect of the education of LAC; this includes an 'Education of LAC' guide specifically for school governors and training courses.

Foster Carers

73. As of August 2005 there were 84 registered Vale of Glamorgan foster carers. The 2005 Foster Carer recruitment campaign included a number of fostering profile raising events and a "Foster for the Vale" campaign that resulted in 47 applications from new carers. It is anticipated that the recruitment of an additional 16-17 foster carers will result from these initiatives. To support the aims of the Placement Strategy the Council intend that this campaign will become an annual event.

The Foster Carers Forum (FCF)

74. During 2001, following the Social Service Inspectorate Wales (SSIW) joint review, to improve communication between carers and the Council the FCF was established and since that time has informed improvements in carer support. Changes to the foster service were instigated as a result of the FCF. These improvements included IT support for carers; introduced approximately 1-2 years ago whereby all carers are provided with a Personal Computer for use within the home to encourage looked after children to develop their IT skills and access the Internet, to support their educational attainment.
75. Foster carers are recruited and operate under the auspices of a payment for skills scheme. The scheme identifies 4 levels of skills categories, each of which receives a different level of remuneration in relation to the complexities of the tasks being undertaken. In all categories the Carers Basic Task Description includes "To promote the healthy growth and development of the child or children, with particular emphasis on health and educational achievement" this emphasises the expectation that carers

should be actively involved in the child's education. More experienced carers need the capacity to follow and adhere to the complex plans for looked after children i.e. PEPs, IEPs etc. for instance level 3 and 4 carers are expected to achieve accreditation to NVQ Level 3 "Caring for Children and Young People". The Carer Basic Task Descriptions inform carer appraisal and remuneration levels.

76. The Foster Carers value the Children First Team, which provides support that includes the '5-minute guide to education'; a library of educational material created specifically for LAC and their carers; and an educational psychologist and specialist teacher to support the needs of both the carer and LAC in respect of schooling issues.

Training and Support

77. The Council provides all carers with a number of guidance documents that relate to support for educational attainment of LAC e.g. "A 5-minute Guide to Education" developed by the Vale Educational Psychologist, and the Foster Care handbook that contains a section on education and employment. During 2004 a rolling training programme 'Make a Difference Foster for the Vale' was established and a supporting booklet was distributed to foster carers. Carers profile has been raised through the introduction of an accredited NVQ Level 3 funded by the Council at a cost of approximately £500 per carer. The NVQ Level 3 has now changed to Health and Social Care; within the NVQ there is an optional module 'Promoting Education for LAC'. This year there has been a greater uptake of the NVQ. Approximately 8 carers are qualified in the Level 3 NVQ and approximately a further 25 are in training.
78. Other more bespoke in-house training has been introduced since June 2004 and has been identified by the NAFW as an example of good practice, however uptake to date has been slow.
79. Carers are reviewed annually; any performance issues are addressed at the independently chaired foster panel. Carer's support of LAC's educational needs is further enhanced through carers' monthly supervision, and direct access to specialist educational support from the Children First Team that includes a library of educational books and software. Carers are very positive about support received from the Children First Team.

Foster Panel

80. In compliance with the statutory requirement the Council established, in October 2003, an independent Foster Panel that meets every month. Its membership reflects the statutory regulations and includes 2 elected Members, an educational psychologist and a young care-leaver from outside the County (Bridgend). An independent expert chairs the panel. Carer annual review/appraisal was re-introduced in 2002, and acts as quality check to ensure the Vale employs the best carers. Review/appraisal is accepted both by officers and carers. Through the process carers need to demonstrate that they have appropriate levels of literacy and numeracy to support the educational attainment of LAC. The report goes to the independent foster panel to consider the carer's continued suitability. To date of the issues identified in reviews, none have related to educational attainment. However, the Foster Panel Annual Report indicates that targets for completion of annual reviews were not met due to staff shortages. Staff appointments made during August 2005 will improve performance against these targets.

Leaving Care Team (LCT) Post 16 LAC

81. The Leaving Care Act 2000 requires the Council maintain contact with LAC that leave care. Within the Vale the LCT work closely with young people and their carers to

ensure that young people are afforded proper opportunities to meet their full potential. Pathway Planning provides responsive and proactive support that meets the needs of its Leaving Care population. The 2005/06 Improvement Plan confirms that in 2004/05 100% of LAC had a pathway plan for continuing care on their 16th birthday (NAWPI 3.3/PA13).

82. The LCT develop clear interface arrangements with other service providers to ensure smooth through-care planning and agree working protocols/arrangements within the Council to ensure a corporate response to young people leaving care. The team has developed support documentation for LAC about to leave care. This includes a "Preparing for Independence at 15+" booklet that the team complete with LAC, and "A Guide to Leaving Care" that provides information to support their move towards independence.
83. The team advise on accommodation options for young people. A Young Persons Protocol with the Housing Department is in place. Choices are available according to assessed need; services are provided to meet the needs of young people aged 16-17 years who become homeless as a result of family breakdown.
84. The team liaises with key providers to further develop and enhance community-based opportunities for young people. Work is in progress to expand the Friendly Lodgings Scheme, organised by Barry-based Llamau Ltd, in partnership with the Council; the Friendly Lodgings Scheme seeks the help of local residents in providing suitable accommodation and support for young care leavers and homeless young people desperately needing a fresh start. The purpose of the scheme is to provide another accommodation option for young people who would prefer to live in a "family" environment before moving on to more independent living and develop skills needed for independent adult life. People with a spare bedroom and interested in helping a young person are recruited from all backgrounds and areas of the Vale. In return, these Lodgings Providers will receive payment, training and support. People who have been involved in this scheme previously have found it to be a very rewarding experience.
85. The LCT has launched a "Preparation for Independence Programme" for young people and their foster carers and has positive working relationships with Fieldwork Teams and clear processes for the allocation of a Llamau Young Persons Advisor. Through the Post-16 and Care Leavers Forum the team work jointly with other key Vale organisations such as Children First, Llamau, Career Wales, Barry College, Basic Skills Agency and the Children and Young Peoples Partnership. Membership on the "Young Builders Trust Steering Group" has enhanced job prospects for LAC leaving care providing funding to train disadvantaged children through a training scheme in the Vale.

Multi Agency

Sure Start

88. Sure Start provides a proactive intervention that attempts to break the cycle of children becoming looked after. Funding for Sure Start comes under the Cymorth Partnership and for existing projects this has been secured until 2008. Launched in 2000, it is the cornerstone of the Government's drive to tackle child poverty and social exclusion. The Council acts as the 'accountable' body and lead agency for the local Sure Start programme. The programme delivery in the Vale involves the Council, Cardiff & Vale NHS Trust, the Local Health Board and the Voluntary Sector National Childrens Homes (NCH). Key officers from these organisations are represented on the Partnership Management Group (PMG). The PMG and Children's Partnership agreed

to target the whole of Barry. Users are continuously and closely involved in the ongoing development of the Sure Start programme.

89. The programme focuses on families with children under 4 and aims to improve the outcomes and life chances for those children who live in the areas of greatest challenge and need, this will include existing LAC as young mothers, and potential LAC. Sure Start undertakes a range of preventative and early intervention work with families to improve the outcomes for those children. The programme is a one-stop shop for parenting, health and development of children up to 4-years old, offering initiatives in play support, speech and language therapy, family support, learning opportunities, social work, midwifery for teenagers and 18+, volunteering/befriending.
90. Sure Start comprises a team of 23 and includes Midwives, Health Visitors, Social Workers, Dieticians, Teacher, Speech and Language Therapist, Volunteer Co-ordinator and 6 NCH Play Workers. Each referred family is allocated a designated key worker who works with the family to develop an individual plan based on the family's needs. The key worker enters and thereafter updates a summary of the plan on the case file. Delivery of services is based on need and usually starts with one-to-one intensive sessions with the family, with gradual introduction to group work and drop-in sessions. Initial assessments enable families to access Family Group Conferencing before a crisis has occurred and before Social Services are involved. This approach and intervention is very effective in reducing the barriers families put up particularly where Social Services do become involved.
91. To provide Basic Skills home visit support to those with identified financial, literacy and numeracy needs on their individual plans the Sure Start programme funds 0.8 of a full-time equivalent Community Education Officer from the Adult Education Division. This support will generally be to teenage mothers who may be LAC and is available for up to ten weeks and aims to reduce barriers that prevent learning, introduce the individual to the Open Learning Centre ELWA funded provision of two-hours per week and increase personal confidence. 6 NCH play workers visit approximately 50 families per week in their homes and provide a 12-week cycle of one-to-one play development sessions with the parent and child. This intervention minimises the chance of the baby being received into a care situation and provides support to young mothers who are already looked after. Once enrolled into the project the young women are able to access all Sure Start services.
92. A number of services have been developed through community partnerships within the Vale, these interventions are provided to a wide group, but will include LAC who are young mothers and baby's that are potential LAC of the future. These services include:
 - the Colcot project co-ordinated by a Sure Start Social Worker the project offers sessions on IT, Domestic Abuse Pattern Changing and a self-support group for Post Natal Depression.
 - providing outreach work to the Western Vale Integrated Children's Centre where 30 hours of play support and 7-hours of volunteer co-ordinator time per week is provided.
 - the Gladstone Partnership for young parents where Sure Start professionals provide two sessions per week to the young parents including transport, finance and monitoring of the project.

93. The Vale's Sure Start Programme reports that approximately 10 -12 young children were prevented from becoming looked after through the intensive work undertaken with families in the Vale.

Gladstone College - Partnership for Young Parents.

94. The Gladstone College project is an education service for 14 to 18 year-old pregnant women and parents. Lottery funding was awarded for three years September 2003 to August 2006. In 2004, 21 young women and their babies attended the project. The ethos of the project is parent first, education second; 7 of the young women were either 'Looked After' or had a social worker from Haydock House. The centre is open five mornings a week with a full-time NCH crèche for the babies, the service provided includes: -
- a mini-bus to collect young women and their babies from their home.
 - English, Maths, IT
 - support around parenting.
 - sexual health, diet and child development classes.
95. The Gladstone College project is the first Sure Start in Wales to link with a College of Further Education. Some young mothers have progressed into the mainstream further education system from the project. This initiative has been recognised as notable practice by the National Assembly.

Children First

96. The initiative started in January 2001, NAFW provided funds designated for Children First to each Welsh local authority to enable them to meet the 11 objectives set out in the national Children First Programme. In 2001, the Council agreed to allocate some of its grant to the employment of educationalists and health professionals, to enable the establishment of what became known as the 'Children First Team'. It is highly unusual for a council to allocate money to what is in effect direct health provision in this way, but the Council believed that this would enable the establishment of a multi-disciplinary team for 3 years until April 2005, for the direct benefit of looked after children. The team included:

2 Nurses – Health	Specialist Teacher – Education
Paediatrician – Health	Education Psychologist – Education
CAMHs Nurse – Health	2 Administrators

97. The Council is committed to continued support for the work of the team and is currently engaged with the Trust to explore partnership arrangements that might support continuance beyond 2005. The Council continues to fund a Specialist Teacher and Education Psychologist, providing continued Education support through the LEA.
98. The Council's Children First Team has contributed to the development of a standardised PEP pro-forma that is used by many Welsh Councils. The pro-forma is with the NAFW and it is hoped that this will be used throughout Wales to improve consistency when a LAC experiences more than one placement and where this occurs in different Councils.
99. The Children First Team enables full assessments of LAC health and educational needs and provides an extra voice for LAC. The team liaises with and co-ordinates the relationship between Social Services, Schools and Health services. The Team provides support to all parties where LAC have school related issues and has raised wider LAC awareness and support to Members, schools, teachers, social workers, and

other agencies through awareness raising initiatives such as a NAFW funded South-Wales regional conference that included:

- Various speakers on LAC issues.
 - A theatre company production of what it is like to be a LAC and video of interviews with post-16 LAC, social workers, teachers, foster carers, health etc.
100. A specialist teacher for the Children First Team attends weekly Education and Childrens Services Placement Panel to discuss issues with existing placements and where appropriate, any options to prevent potential LAC placements occurring through provision of support as a child in need. A close working relationship with the Pupil Support Service (PSS) exists.
101. Admission to a local school is reported to be important to the educational attainment of LAC. The Specialist Teacher from the Children First Team may attend statutory LAC reviews and attend meetings to discuss LAC education issues and possible exclusions. Support is provided to foster carers through advice, training, guidance e.g. LAC education packs; to social workers e.g. in gaining admission of LAC to local schools by coordinating between social workers, parents, schools and the LEA. Training includes annual training courses for teachers designated as LAC coordinators; and to social workers to better inform them on current educational procedures particularly in relation to PEP completion and compliance with other policies and code of practice such as in cases of potential LAC exclusions.
102. Literacy and Numeracy support is provided to LAC, this includes access to a Children First Resource Centre of reading material, CD ROMs, revision guides and other support information. The Specialist Teacher from the Children First Team provides access to the Catch-Up programme and additional literacy provision through a local initiative with the Atlantic College where Catch-Up basic level trained students provide an additional 3 afternoons support per week to the Barry and Western Vale. The team facilitates further support from the Vale Volunteer Board. The Children First Team consider that targeted extra tuition for pre-GCSE LAC would further improve their GCSE results.

Voluntary Bodies

103. The Children and Young People's Framework Partnership is the strategic decision making body to which the more operational Children's Partnership and Young Peoples Partnership report; it also oversees Cymorth. Cymorth is a NAFW initiative providing funding to provide a network of targeted support for children and young people within a framework of universal provision, in order to improve the life chances of children and young people from disadvantaged families. Cymorth promotes inclusion and user involvement, works in partnership integrating with and adding value to mainstream services, and is based on early preventative intervention. It builds on previous initiatives such as Sure Start.
104. Voluntary bodies provide additional assistance and support to the educational needs of LAC. In the Vale these would include the Amelia Farm Trust, Llamau, Spurgeon's Child Care, Vale Voluntary Board, SNAP Cymru, and NCH (National Children's Home).
105. The Amelia Farm Trust, at Key Stage 3, provides 20 youngsters aged from 11 to 14 with the opportunity to receive a National Curriculum education. The Youth Access initiative delivers alternative curriculum for 14 to 16 year olds and provides the opportunity for them to study the core subjects of English and Mathematics, undertake projects that develop life-skills (budgeting and cookery). Projects are undertaken both on the farm and in the community; these lead to accreditation in a variety of schemes

e.g. Duke of Edinburgh and ASDAN youth award. The community projects also help to raise social awareness and skills for life. Work experience opportunities are provided to a wide range of young people. The Council and the Amelia Trust jointly fund much of this work.

107. Spurgeon's Child Care provides an advocacy and independent visitor service to LAC. The independent visitor service provides the child with a friend or confidante. In liaison with Social Services the advocacy service builds relationships with LAC, listens to their views, concerns and issues and responds on the child's behalf to the appropriate body e.g. the Social Worker, case review or complaints procedure. Spurgeon's has a project manager, one advocacy worker and access to part-time advocacy trained volunteers. It is reported that the Spurgeon's caseload is heavy and that generally they find the Council listen to, and try to resolve issues, and complaints.
108. The NCH Crisis Intervention Service works with children and families to maintain children within the care of their families and also with young people leaving care. In 2004/05 NCH maintained 40 children at home and the management fund financed preventative packages for a further 19 children to remain in the care of their families. Llamau facilitate support to young people leaving care; principally providing advisors and accommodation options for those wishing to become independent. SNAP Cymru provides advice and support to the parents of children and young people with special educational needs.

Notable Practice– The Education of Looked After Children

109. A significant number of Councils have implemented initiatives aimed at removing and /or minimising the barriers to LAC educational success. Councils undertake a significant number of initiatives in partnership with other statutory and voluntary organisations. Research of notable practice elsewhere is summarised at Appendix 1.

Notable Practice in the Vale of Glamorgan

125. LAC are at the centre of NAFW's programmes to transform the quality of children's services. In response the Vale meets or is currently implementing many of the above notable practice initiatives. Strategic planning is in place through the community strategy, corporate plan and service plan aspects of the corporate performance management framework and is refined through strategies such as the Placement Strategy and frameworks such as the Children and Young People's Framework Partnership. The placement strategy adopted for children's out of county placements seeks to reduce placement budget to base by 2006/07; this will require a significant shift in balance of resource deployment away from currently purchased provision and towards prevention. To be achieved it will need more aggressive spend to save initiatives.
126. Dedicated teams are in place to support LAC. The Children First programme has a key objective for LAC, 'ensuring that children looked after gain the maximum life chance benefits from educational opportunities, health care and social care' and is valued by all stakeholders. The Council also has set up dedicated teams to promote and support LAC e.g. Placement, Fostering, Leaving Care, Children First and service level agreements are agreed with voluntary organisations e.g. Barnardos, NCH, Llamau, Spurgeons Child Care to further enhance this support. Children and young people have been closely involved in the development and design of the Children's Complaints process, and are now involved in the consultation to inform the provision of a booklet for LAC. The Children's Complaints Officer regularly reports to the Corporate Parenting Panel, these complaint reports have provided a basis for improving service quality.

127. Designated teachers are in place in every school in the Vale. Literacy and Numeracy activities are in place primarily through Catch Up. PEPs are in place and extended to pre-school LAC via nursery provision. Information sharing will be improved through the piloting of the new Integrated Childrens Services System.
128. Exclusions are managed to low levels through the intervention of teams such as Children First and where needed at Key Stage 4 alternative curriculum is provided through initiatives such as the Amelia Farm Trust. Advocacy and mentoring is available through support from organisations such as Spurgeons Child Care.
129. Council LAC related training is widely available; it includes training courses for elected Members, school governors, designated teachers, foster carers etc.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are drawn from the body of the report.

- A The Council performs well against performance indicators when compared to all-Wales. However, while the educational attainment of Vale LAC is above the all-Wales average, it is currently well below the average attainment of all-Vale children at SATS and GCSE.
- B The number of LAC varies from week to week but there is a downward trend since the implementation of the Placement Strategy. Whilst the majority of LAC are placed within the Vale a third are placed outside of the County. LAC represent a small proportion of the overall population of children 0 to 19 years of age. There are more male than female LAC.
- C LAC attendance levels, fixed-term and permanent exclusions compares well against the levels for all children.
- D LAC with a statement of SEN represents a small proportion of the Vale's statemented population.
- E Vale schools fully comply with the requirement to designate a teacher as responsible for LAC.
- F The PEP is a crucial support to the educational attainment of LAC, it sets out their needs, targets and provides a valuable progress monitoring mechanism. The roles and responsibilities with regard to the completion of the PEP do not appear to be consistently understood or interpreted by all parties. Compliance with PEP targets has been an area of poor performance.
- G Whilst Cabinet and the Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee receives relevant LAC specific performance information, the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee receives little LAC specific performance information
- H The placement strategy has helped to reduce the overall number of 'child weeks' spent in care. The strategic intent of the placement strategy will also support improved educational attainment of LAC as the Council should place more LAC within the Vale. Wide research and evidence within the Vale supports the view that the home LEA and schools will better support placements. Provision that facilitates more and better-supported foster carers, respite care and enhanced community based family support services to increase the prospect of children remaining with their families. Further the concept of, and focus by, the Council on permanence typically through adoption will lead to improved stability and further enhance the educational opportunities.
- I The First Contact team contributes to averting accommodation for children/young people.
- J The Vale has increasing numbers of registered Foster Carers and has implemented recruitment initiatives to continue this expansion to support the requirements of the Placement Strategy. The Foster Carers Forum has promoted improvements in foster carer support and standards. Foster carers have four levels of skill categories each having a basic task description linked to the appraisal system and remuneration; all promote the educational attainment of LAC.
- K The Foster Panel is independent and provides a quality assurance element to the provision of foster care through the carer annual appraisal system. Targets for the completion of carer annual reviews have not been met.

- L The Leaving Care Team provides support, and clear information and guidance to young people about to leave care and 100% of LAC had a Pathway Plan in place on their 16th birthday.
- M The Council and other agencies that provide LAC support services value the Children First advocacy, support and coordinating role that support the education and well being of LAC. The Children First team will lose its health focus as a result of funding issues.
- N Catch-Up has contributed to an improvement in the reading age of LAC
- O Cymorth is a NAFW initiative providing funding to provide a network of targeted support for children and young people within a framework of universal provision. It aims to improve the life chances of children and young people from disadvantaged families. It works in partnership integrating with and adding value to mainstream services, and is based on early preventative intervention. It builds on previous initiatives such as Sure Start.
- P Voluntary bodies provide important support to LAC in terms of advocacy, education and when leaving care. Much of this work is jointly funded and in partnership with the Council, adding capacity resilience and expertise to Council services.

Recommendations

- (1) T H A T Scrutiny Committee (Lifelong Learning) receive termly reports on LAC together with an annual report on the attainment of LAC.
- (2) T H A T the LAC report and this Committee's recommendations be referred to Scrutiny Committee (Community Wellbeing and Safety) for information.
- (3) T H A T the annual report on the attainment of LAC be referred to the Corporate Management Team and Cabinet for consideration and action.
- (4) T H A T the roles and responsibilities of all PEP stakeholders be clarified in relation to the PEPs timely completion and review and that the Director of Learning and Development and Community Services prepare a joint report with proposals to improve performance on production of PEP and monitoring arrangements.
- (5) T H A T a mechanism for ensuring the effective monitoring of the Council's performance in relation to PEPs that provides regular summary reports to relevant Scrutiny Committees of LAC progress against PEP targets be established and that the Directors of Learning and Development and Community Services jointly prepare a report to contain proposals as to how this could be achieved.
- (6) T H A T an administrator be appointed to improve the co-ordination of all placements with all agencies and that the Directors of Learning and Development and Community Services jointly report on proposals to achieve this.
- (7) T H A T the review and implementation of a programme of Corporate Parenting awareness raising continue so that all services, officers and Elected Members understand and establish their roles and responsibilities in full.
- (8) T H A T the Director of Learning and Development implement arrangements to establish a Governor Champion for LAC in every school.
- (9) T H A T the Director of Learning and Development include within the Governors Handbook a section on LAC and the requirements of Governors as Corporate Parents and also report back to Scrutiny Committee (Lifelong Learning) on the take up of training.
- (10) T H A T Human Resources and Equalities develop proposals to provide work experience for LAC's in recognition of the Council's Parenting role in developing further work experience opportunities for local young people about to leave care.
- (11) T H A T the Director of Environmental and Economic Regeneration be requested to consider proposals for LAC and their families to access the 'Freestyle' Leisure Membership Scheme without charge and report back to this Committee.

- (12) T H A T the Director of Community Services report back, following consultation with the Foster Carers Forum, on arrangements to ensure Foster Carers have better access to utilise available support services and advice, including the provision of IT equipment to support the educational attainment of LAC.
- (13) T H A T the Director of Learning and Development report back on proposals to enhance Youth and Lifelong Learning opportunities for LAC leaving care.
- (14) T H A T Cabinet be recommended to support the extension of funding for Sure Start post 2008.
- (15) T H A T Cabinet be recommended to support the extension of funding for Gladstone College post 2006.
- (16) T H A T Cabinet be recommended to consider an extension of funding to extend Sure Start across the Council area.
- (17) T H A T the Director of Learning and Development consider options to ensure the long-term provision of the services currently provided by the Children First Team.
- (18) T H A T the Admissions Forum develop proposals to prioritise LAC admissions to schools of their choice and that the proposals be reported back to this Committee for information.
- (19) T H A T the Director of Learning and Development introduce arrangements to ensure that relevant LAC pupil data (e.g. to support GCSE preparation) is provided to schools.
- (20) T H A T Cabinet considers additional funding to LAC on entry to new schools to support transitional arrangements and that the Director of Learning and Development develop proposals to ensure that LAC receive additional tuition and support prior to GCSE.
- (21) T H A T the Director of Learning and Development bring back to the Committee proposals for ensuring the provision to LAC of Early Years placements.
- (22) T H A T the Directors of Learning and Development and Community Services investigate the provision of post 18 support, to include 'bed and lodging' services and report back.
- (23) T H A T the reports referred in recommendations (4), (5), (6), (12), (13), (18), (21) and (22) be reported to the meeting of Scrutiny Committee (Lifelong Learning) scheduled for January 2006.

Summary Of Notable Practice

Structures and Funding

LAC were given high priority by all Councils researched, but not all Councils were supported by effective strategic planning arrangements aimed at delivering the key LAC outcomes required by their Corporate Parenting duty. Some councils have developed excellent support arrangements including health promotion, access to CAMHS, school admissions, pre-school children and mentoring. These councils routinely prioritise LAC access to local services to address the issues that prevent them from focusing on their education.

A number of authorities have dedicated teams for LAC usually established jointly between Social Services and Education. The integration of all services is aimed at creating and maximising the life chances for this client group through an enhanced service, which caters to their needs individually. Intensive packages are tailored to meet the LAC emotional, health and educational needs in consultation with key stakeholders involved in the child's upbringing. Support packages to meet educational needs include arranging transport to schools, in-class support, exam preparation, homework support, study sessions, counselling, devising Personal Education Plans (PEPs) to build strong links between home and schools, tracking and resolving attendance issues, transitional support when looked after children change schools, access to leisure and cultural activities, careers advice and work experience to prepare looked after children for full time employment. The identified needs of LAC around health and emotional wellbeing are factored into support packages.

Service Level Agreements have been introduced by a number of local authorities to improve the educational outcomes and life chances for this client group. The agreements cover Health, Education, Social Services and Leisure Services and identify roles and responsibilities of all professionals involved in delivering services to looked after children and young people including relevant agreements and protocols.

Councils that had dedicated teams for LAC also had dedicated budgets/resources in place. A number had budgets that were specific to the educational attainment of LAC. In some cases, these were devolved to the relevant primary and secondary schools to enable the schools to improve attainment at various stages of the curriculum where looked after children were identified as being weak. The funds are linked to PEPs although consideration is given to issues raised outside the plans which impact on the wellbeing of looked after children.

Designated Teachers

The majority of local authorities have designated teachers within each primary and secondary school who are usually senior/head teachers with sufficient authority to influence school policy and practice and act as both a resource and advocate for a child looked after by the authority. These designated teachers are provided with regular and up-to-date training on issues that impact on the education of looked after children.

Literacy and Numeracy Activities

A significant number of the programmes in place for Looked After Children are aimed at improving their numeracy and literacy skills and include initiatives such as book reading clubs, library welcome packs and reader support sessions, book bag schemes, book ownership schemes, 'buddy readers', creative writing projects and workshops, 'post-bag' schemes, book ownership schemes and resource boxes. In the majority of these schemes, carers are offered training opportunities aimed at enabling them to help their child improve their literacy and numeracy skills. As part of the training carers are encouraged to keep diaries of what they do and the progress made.

The majority of the councils also had arrangements in place to provide support for Looked After Children with their schoolwork to ensure they did not get behind in their education. Initiatives include Catch Up tuition programmes, study skills seminars and workshops, study support schemes, home tuition schemes, out of hours study groups and study support materials. These are usually provided through partnership arrangements between by the local authority Education and Social Services departments and voluntary sector organisations.

Care and Education Planning (Personal Education Plans)

All councils researched have introduced the key document for promoting the education of Looked After Children - Personal Education Plans (PEPs) as set out in government guidance for the education of LAC. A significant number of councils have put into place comprehensive monitoring arrangements to ensure that all LAC have effective PEPs, which are reviewed quarterly (termly), six-monthly, and annually with action to meet identified needs followed up. The review of PEPs is generally undertaken to identify how effectively the needs of the young person are being met in respect of access to services and support, contribution to stability, any relevant special needs requirements and minimising disruption to schooling. Joint teams responsible for LAC are usually made up of Education and Social Services officers whose key responsibility is to ensure that every young person in care has a PEP which forms an integral part of their Care Plan together with existing education plans e.g. statement of special needs where relevant.

A number of councils have extended the use of PEPs to looked after pre-school children (below 5 years old). The completion, monitoring and review of pre-school PEPs is led by the LEA in partnership with social workers and local nurseries and information is shared through the use of a common database.

Sharing of information is key in ensuring effective PEPs and a number of councils have introduced comprehensive structures and processes to ensure this is the case. The structures and processes are aimed at encouraging meaningful dialogue between the young person, primary carers, case holders, designated teachers and personal advisors, which is essential to the PEP process. To facilitate the process a number of councils also have a common database, which provides a comprehensive picture of the individual child and all children looked after by the Council.

Out of School Activities

As part of their commitment to enhance the life chances of LAC, a significant number of councils have introduced specific out of school activities that ensure that learning is not confined to the classroom and formal education activities. This enables the children and young people in question to enjoy a wide variety of activities that develops their confidence, skills and friendships outside the school environment. Activities are usually centred on the arts, leisure and sports and include initiatives such as the Friday Club, Passport to Leisure, summer residential visits to various locations, Summer schools and free tickets to museums and local events.

Reducing Permanent Exclusions

Exclusion from school has been identified as one of the barriers preventing LAC achieve educationally. To combat this a number of councils introduced home tuition schemes, which provide intensive support to children and young people to prevent exclusions, support transitions and improve behaviour in addition to supporting learning in school or in the home. Support usually involves a range of personnel including designated teachers, teaching assistants, specialist teachers, SENCOs (Special Educational Needs Coordinators), Behaviour Support Services, Educational Welfare and home tutors. Programmes usually last a maximum of 8 weeks.

A number of councils have introduced mentoring schemes as a means of support and to raise the educational aspirations of LAC. The schemes identified cover both primary and secondary age children and young people. The role of the 'primary' mentor is to provide support around literacy and numeracy and link in with carers to provide information and support about the children's individual needs and learning. This support is provided during school hours and out of school hours. As well as providing support, 'secondary' mentors promote a positive image of further education to inspire young people who might not otherwise consider this option to do so. A number of councils often in partnership with universities have introduced programmes that enable young people in care to experience a taster session of life in university. Activities are usually tailored to meet the needs and interest of the young people and include various lectures and activity sessions in identified areas of interest and study days. Some councils have appointed specialist teachers in post-16 education advising on courses, interview preparation and help with university and college admissions, applications forms etc.

Training

All the local authorities researched provide a variety of training initiatives and this caters for the wide of range of people involved in the lives of children and young people looked after. They include parents, carers, social workers, youth workers, and educational staff within local authorities, schools and designated teachers. A number of those listed above are also given opportunities to train to become tutors, learning mentors and personal advisors. In one council, a worker from every children's service team is provided with regular training to enable them to be an additional educational resource for their team – known as Social Worker Leads.

On a day-to-day basis, a variety of training opportunities are provided to the carers of LAC and Young People including those based at residential homes. The training and support given usually focuses on helping carers carry out their role in relation to raising the educational attainment of the children and young people they look after. This includes helping them understand their role and responsibilities and improving their knowledge of the education system. Training opportunities include initiatives ranging from literacy and numeracy to out of school activities aimed at developing life skills. They also include other activities such as workshops on educational issues, information guides, links to school, development of competencies and the development of a carers plan in line with PEPs. There is designated teacher involvement in the above initiatives with overall support usually provided jointly by Education and Social Services teams.

Health and Wellbeing

Building on a strong foundation of Personal Social Health Education within their schools, some local authorities have used the Healthy Schools initiative to emphasise a holistic and whole school approach to children's health, development and wellbeing and to creating an environment where pupils feel safe and included and where 'difference' is understood and respected. Alongside the core elements of the National Healthy Schools Programme, a wide range of themes have been introduced to reflect local need including environment (promoting inclusion), emotional health and wellbeing, curriculum and community. Projects and activities are undertaken in relation to each theme and include, healthier and safer routes to school, healthy eating, physical activity, drugs prevention, pre-school settings, celebrating success and citizenship.

Alongside the above, some councils run health and wellbeing days, which are well attended by young people, their carers, social workers and councillors. Organised jointly by Social Services and Education these themed days are used to raise awareness of the health and wellbeing issues of looked after children and young people. A variety of activities are provided to emphasise health and wellbeing including dietary advice (dietician), reflexology, health checks e.g. blood pressure, blood sugar levels, sexual

health/advice, virtual babies (teenage pregnancy), health and safety advice, Indian Head Massage, library services, college and further education advice, hair braiding, body art, face painting, manicures, basketball, football, kick boxing, music, magician, storytelling, badge making, competitions and prizes. Free 'goody' bags are given out to all young people containing information and other goodies to do with health and leisure.

Recognition of Achievement/ Raising the profile of Children Looked After

Councils have introduced a variety of initiatives as a means of recognising achievement and raising the profile generally of Looked After Children. Whilst councils take several approaches, they all usually involve some form of public recognition for personal and educational achievement at award events or ceremonies and cover the 3-16 age group. As well as providing children and young people with traditional rewards such as certificates, medals and gift vouchers, experience type rewards in the form of activities are also offered. The local authorities researched all linked their reward schemes to completion of agreed personal and educational targets within individual PEPs.