HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER - WHITE PAPER
CARE MATTERS – TIME FOR CHANGE

Importance has been placed on the health needs of looked after children for a number of years now. However the White Paper Care Matters highlights the continuing need to address the poor health outcomes of children in care by securing the health and also the wider wellbeing of children and young people. Two thirds of the looked after children population are reported to have at least one physical health complaint and many looked after children may be at risk of mental health problems. Health is not restricted to health care professionals as school attainment and placement stability can improve emotional attachment and increase resilience. Effective promotion of health and well-being is about empowerment and the development of self-esteem, this confidence can be increased by involving looked after children in play and positive activities. The health benefits of placement stability, educational outcomes and leisure pursuits all contribute to improving the resilience and life chances of looked after children.

MEASURES SET OUT IN THE WHITE PAPER
White Paper provides a sharper focus on Health of LAC by Local Health Partners

Guidance called “Promoting the Health of Looked After Children” is statutory for local authorities but not for the NHS. The White Paper intends to re-issue this guidance in 2008 on a statutory footing for both local authorities and healthcare bodies. The guidance will also explore how to improve coordination including the potential benefits of a named health professional.

Local Context-Screening Tool for Substance Misuse

Guidance will also include the need to address substance abuse. There is a worker from Visions (Substance Misuse Service) who works solely with looked after young people. A new screening tool is being developed which will identify looked after children aged 11+ years. The worker will meet with all newly admitted LAC and offer information and interventions in drug and/or alcohol use.

Local Context-Health Assessments and Health Action Plans

The percentage of health and dental assessments which are completed is running at 90%. We monitor to ensure that this performance is equally distributed between children and young people in and out of borough. All looked after children placed within 20 miles are encouraged to come to the Hounslow Health LAC team for their medicals.

We have introduced a tracking and monitoring system of all Health Action Plans (HAPs) whether in or out of borough. The LAC Paediatrician signs all HAPs and makes recommendations for action. The latter are closely tracked to ensure implementation and reported on a monthly basis. All Health Action Plans are signed off by the LAC Paediatrician which ensures equity of provision in children placed in and out of borough. All young people who decline medicals are tracked and actively followed up and this has resulted in improved uptake by young people aged 16+.

The health needs of children looked after are being collated to enable an overall health profile of need. A range of health needs was suggested by the LAC Paediatrician and each young person’s health needs are categorised under a certain heading. An analysis of health needs is to be undertaken in March 2008 by which time all data will have been collected.
White Paper is considering a new indicator on Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties of LAC

Guidance to ensure CAMHS provide targeted and dedicated provision that appropriately prioritises children in care.

Local Context on Therapeutic Resources
There are several in-house therapeutic resources which aim to promote the mental health of children in care. The Adolescent Clinical Social Worker and the LAC Psychologist posts are funded by the CAMHS modernisation grant and provide a valuable service providing consultation to social workers and direct work with looked after children.

White Paper is Promoting Sexual Health

Guidance will be issued to schools on how to support the sex and relationship education (SRE). The White Paper is also promoting the provision of guidance to foster carers and wishes to ensure that social workers have the necessary skills to assess the need for sex and relationship education.

Local Context on SRE
The Sexual and Relationship Education Policy has been completed and is available electronically. The LAC nurse is now qualified as a Speakeasy facilitator, this course is offered to foster carers to speak about relationships and sex with young people. So far all the carers who have completed the course have reached Level 2.

The White Paper is setting new standards for support to pregnant young women and mothers in care and leaving care. The need for support has been recognised and two Parent and Baby Groups have been set up by the Futures and Asylum teams in order to facilitate self-awareness and healthy lifestyles. A worker from the Teenage Pregnancy team is involved in running one of these groups.

Condom Card training has been relaunched and social care staff have attended training on giving contraceptive advice. Workers from Hounslow's two residential units, The Spot, Futures and Asylum team have attended training and each team now has a resource box.

White Paper is Promoting Play and Positive Activities
Guidance clarifies that children in care need to be helped to overcome barriers to participation and the availability of positive activities needs to be transformed.

Local Context on Leisure Activities
Leisure activities are a key part of care planning and are discussed at the start of a child’s placement and monitored via the statutory review process. The need to help children and young people in care take up activities is recognised and the LAC Nurse has set up several projects. The key aim of the Circuit Training Project is to encourage young people to participate in some regular exercise. The weekly sessions which are led by a qualified fitness trainer and involve the young people undertaking a range of exercises using different pieces of gym equipment. The LAC Nurse has recently received a Glaxo-SmithKline health award and the funding received will enable her to buy some new equipment.
The What’s Out There Group is another project which was set up to encourage children in care to experience new activities and develop self-confidence. It is a partnership initiative between Children’s Services and ConneXions. Members are aged between 11 and 13 years, they participate in activities which relate to healthy lifestyles and they are encouraged to engage in tasks which develop their decision-making skills and help them feel more valued members of their local community.

White Paper Emphasising the need to Transform Leisure Time

Guidance focuses on the need for local authorities to provide free leisure access for children in care and to facilitate their involvement in youth work activities. The White Paper also sets out that they will ask schools to ensure that children in care are eligible for free access to certain activities before and after school. Besides this access to extended activities, it is expected that free music tuition will be available in schools for children in care. In keeping with the role of corporate parent the guidance states that the Director of Children’s Services will need to ensure that the health and wellbeing of children in care are addressed.

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