

# Care Matters: transforming the lives of children and young people in care

## Consultation Response Form

The closing date for this consultation is: 15  
January 2007

Your comments must reach us by that date.

department for

**education and skills**

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**Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.**

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If you have an enquiry relating to the policy content of this consultation you can contact Helen White by email: [helen.white@dfes.qsi.gov.uk](mailto:helen.white@dfes.qsi.gov.uk) or by telephone: 0870 000 2288.

If you have a query relating to the consultation process you can contact the Consultation Unit by:

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Which of the following best describes you:

<input type="checkbox"/> Child in care (under 13)	<input type="checkbox"/> Child in care (under 18)	<input type="checkbox"/> Care leaver
<input type="checkbox"/> Foster carer	<input type="checkbox"/> Residential carer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Professional working with young people
<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer working with young people	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

Please Specify:

I am the Chief Executive of Shaftesbury Homes & Arethusa an organisation which has provided care for children in need for 164 years.

We currently provide residential care, leaving care and supported housing services backed with our own education, health and outdoor pursuits facilities working in 9 local authorities in England with young people from several more. We also work in strategic partnership with TACT (The Adolescent and Children's Trust) a voluntary organisation who provide foster care, adoption and kinship care.

This response to the consultation is submitted on behalf of Shaftesbury Homes & Arethusa although it in no way precludes any of our young people, staff and trustees submitting their own equally valid contributions.

If you work with children or young people in care, which best describes the organisation you work in:

<input type="checkbox"/> Local authority	<input type="checkbox"/> School	<input type="checkbox"/> Further or higher education institution
<input type="checkbox"/> Private sector organisation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Voluntary and community sector organisation	<input type="checkbox"/> Health organisation
<input type="checkbox"/> Youth justice organisation	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

We are a voluntary organisation operated by a Board of Trustees and a charity registered with the Charity Commission .

## Chapter 1: The need for reform

1 Are the elements we suggest for our 'pledge' the right ones?

Yes

No

Not Sure

### Comments:

The 'pledge' is a really good idea.

However, even the concept of a 'core pledge' needs to be developed further to address the worst aspects of the current system. Most notable of these is the chronic lack of stability in placements. Also, we are sceptical about the usefulness of 'choice' of when to enter adult life feeling that it is of limited benefit to powerless people. We think it would be more useful to have a general presumption backed by inspection that young people do not go into independence before 18. We also believe that the 'corporate parent' should be ambitious for its young people and prepared to assist them in the way that good parents do.

Other pledges could be :

1. A stability guarantee :- In care we will aim to ensure that you will have no more than 2 temporary placements. If you are in a long term placement we will try to ensure that you will be able to remain there unless there arises a child protection issue or unforeseeable circumstances which mean that it is not in your best interests to remain.
2. Moves will be kept to an absolute minimum and we will seek to ensure that all moves are well planned with good opportunities for introductions, to say goodbye and to keep in touch.
3. We want to ensure that you only move on from care when you are ready to enter adult life. Once you have done so, as long as you respect other young people and staff you will be welcome to return and we will seek to give you the advice and assistance that any good parent would offer to their own child.
4. We have high aspirations for you and want you to have a happy, fulfilling and successful life. We will challenge you to do well and want you to tell us if there is more that we can do to help you

2 Are there other key barriers to attainment which we should address in order to transform outcomes?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

The critical barriers to attainment are the low aspirations of corporate parents and carers and the instability of placements coupled with the failure to implement the Children (Leaving Care) Act and the duty in the Children Act 2004 to promote the educational outcomes of children in care properly .

Shaftesbury's DfES funded education service has demonstrated success in GCSE attainments but these are undermined by local authorities who are not committed enough to supporting young people in mainstream education and who remove young people from care at 16.

We would urge the Government to inspect local authorities explicitly in terms of their ability to be good corporate parents and we strongly recommend that their performance in this uniquely important duty should be decisive with regard to ratings of excellence in Annual Performance Assessments and Joint Area Reviews.

We cannot understand why Fostering and Residential Care services which fail to meet National Minimum standards are not closed down. In addition standards should be raised in order to ensure that all care situations support the whole range of ECM outcomes.

## Chapter 2: Children on the edge of care

3 What more can be done to reassert the responsibility of parents and help them to fulfill those responsibilities?

Comments:

We could :

1. Require that all local authorities work within an ethos that children should be supported within families wherever possible where this is in the best interests of the child. A crucial safeguard must always be that the views of children are sought and given real credibility.
2. Develop programmes of intensive support for families at risk with a particular focus upon the quality of attachment to both parents and significant kinship figures during the first 12 months. Locate this service within the non-stigmatising ambit of health visiting but ensure that this is a multi-disciplinary task. Utilise organisations and individuals with the skills and credibility to engage with hard to reach families.
3. Teach the skills of parenting as part of the national curriculum to all age groups.
4. Provide 7 day support services with a particular focus on evenings and weekends.

4 a) Do you agree that there is a need for a more systematic approach to sharing effective practice in children's services?

✓ Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

Creating a National Centre for Excellence in Children and Family services and building upon the work of SCIE and NCERC is an excellent proposal.

4 b) If so, how can we ensure maximum impact in supporting evidence-informed commissioning and practice?

Comments:

Service commissioners and providers should be evaluated on their use of practice guidance emanating from such an authoritative body.

5 What more can be done to support links between adult and children's services, particularly in relation to drug abuse and mental health support?

Comments:

A more effective transitions service fulfilling statutory duties to support young people up to the age of 21 or to 24 if in education would be better able to link with adult services. In our experience, at the moment young people who leave residential care at 16 are falling through the gaps sometimes with disastrous consequences for their mental health.

It is absolutely essential that all services working with adults who are parents or who have contact with children work within the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the paramountcy principle of the Children Act 1989. However vulnerable the adult it is the best interests of the child which are of paramount concern. This is a particular issue where children take on major caring responsibilities in respect of parents.

6 What more could be done to support family and friends carers?

Comments:

We could :

1. Pay an amount commensurate with fostering allowance where this is necessary to provide an alternative to a care placement.
2. Ensure that the carer and the child have access to respite foster care/residential care, 7 day support, counselling etc where appropriate.

We support the proposal that Local Authorities be required to produce an outline plan before care proceedings which would deal with friends and family issues. We recommend that local authorities should be required to demonstrate a similar process when considering young people entering care on a voluntary basis.

7 Is it right for us to work towards an increase in the number of children supported in families and, as a result, a small younger care population with more complex needs?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

It is clearly right to work towards an increase in the number of children supported in families. However, it does not automatically follow that this would lead to a smaller, younger care population.

Unless a very large number of families are to be intensively supported over many years and across many potentially disruptive experiences with a great degree of efficacy there is still likely to be a 'bulge' in family breakdown during adolescence. To underplay the need to provide high quality resources for a considerable number of young people will create a new wave of homelessness for 15 year olds and help create a new generation of parents with problems. We can improve outcomes for children in Care and over time reduce the care population to a point where it is focussed on younger children with more complex needs. However, this will require consistent work over generations and across Parliaments rather than the quick fix implied here.

### Chapter 3: The role of the corporate parent

8 Do the proposals in this chapter add up to a sufficient strengthening of the corporate parenting role? If not what more should be done?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

Much more should be done to require local authorities to carry out their unique corporate parenting duties well. Children and Young People in Care should be a focus of civic pride and every opportunity should be taken to involve, support and celebrate them. Every senior officer in every council should have to take an interest in one young person in care and ask questions of their colleagues about their progress.

In Islington, the Mayor and Leader of the Council take a particular interest in their young people in Care and one Councillor holds regular surgeries specifically for them. Across the Council they have an apprenticeship scheme for young people leaving care. Given the huge resources of local authorities there is no reason why every single one of them could not develop a vast range of initiatives and opportunities. Too often the only thing lacking is the ambition and aspiration that every good parent has for their own children. Perhaps above all it is the duty of the local authority to ensure that their duty to be good parents is reflected in every department at every level so that they are taking a real corporate approach to this task.

However strong the exhortation of Government we do not believe that corporate parenting will be given the attention it deserves across all 150 local authorities without rigorous scrutiny and enforcement.

Once again we would urge the Government to inspect local authorities explicitly in terms of their ability to be good corporate parents and we strongly recommend that their performance in this uniquely important duty should be decisive with regard to ratings of excellence in Annual Performance Assessments and Joint Area Reviews.

9 Would a 'social care practice' help give social workers more freedom to support children?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

It would also help to ensure long term stability for the child because this approach would make it possible for them to be 'held' within a close network of resources and relationships. The profound importance of this proposal is that it would enable vital relationships to be maintained over time even when personnel alter and placements change.

Shaftesbury believe that the proposal for social care practices is the single most important idea within this Green Paper. We hope that the Government will recognise that all the 'noise' around this proposal indicates that it could be a driver for real change.

Social Care Practices also provide a real opportunity for the voluntary and private sectors to bring some necessary flexibility to a partnership with the statutory public sector. Shaftesbury Homes & Arethusa are working with our partners Serco to develop a programme entitled 'Good Parenting' which bring together a range of resources to 'stick' with the most needy young people in the care system to provide stability and improved outcomes. We would be delighted to discuss this programme with officials as part of 'next steps'.

10 Should the Independent Visitor role be revitalised and renamed as 'independent advocate' to introduce advocacy as a key element of the role?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

All children and young people in Care should be able to have access to an independent advocate whether they are making a complaint or not.

This seems a cost effective way of providing access to an advocate if all local authorities can be persuaded to develop an independent visitor scheme.

Care experienced young people and adults have a great deal to offer to this role.

## Chapter 4: Ensuring children are in the right placements

11 a) Should a 'tiered' approach to fostering placements be developed?

Yes

 No

✓ Not Sure

### Comments:

We entirely support proposals for :

1. A new framework of skills incorporating the principles of social pedagogy for foster carers and residential staff.
2. A new foundation degree in working with children in care.
3. Revised national minimum standards for fostering services and residential care.
4. A revised framework of fees.
5. A mandatory national registration scheme for foster carers.

We are sceptical about structuring the model too closely around the needs of children. Both residential and foster carers should be helped to constantly develop their skills. If payment is too closely tied to the perceived needs of children this can lead to very unsatisfactory anomalies say when a very troubled child settles down in a placement and the hard work of foster carers is 'rewarded' with a reduction in fees. If payment is related to actual skills any qualms about paying foster carers at a high level for 'easier ' placements could be alleviated by utilising them in training, foster care approval etc.

11 b) If so, should this be underpinned by a formal qualification framework?

✓ Yes

 No Not Sure

### Comments:

The framework should however, recognise practical skills and experience for example an NVQ.

It would be useful if the formal qualification framework could be developed in line with existing qualifications in health and social care. This would enable staff already working within the care industry to have their existing qualifications recognised and built on – different levels of entry and credits ?

## 12 How can we increase placement choice without increasing financial burdens on the system?

### Comments:

We currently operate 8 children's homes on both a contractual and spot purchase basis.

Our experience is different from that described in 'Care Matters'. We provide good quality residential care with stable groups of staff and qualification levels approaching 100%. We easily surpass national minimum standards across the board. We try to provide good value for money. Last year we subsidised our spot purchased residential service by £400,000. Unfortunately the young people in our care are often on the sharp end of very poor social work practice :

- Unplanned emergency placements.
- Placements made by unqualified 'brokerage' services dominated by cost considerations.
- Young people who have been refused services to the point where families are alienated and they have been at great risk.
- Residential care used as a very last resort after repeated fostering breakdowns.
- Young people removed from our care as soon as they turn 16 to go into 'semi-independence' on the grounds of cost.

With the odd exception it is very difficult to engage with local authorities to plan services and 'commissioning' seems to operate on very crude purchaser/provider lines keeping us at arms length when we have good knowledge which could contribute to planning. We are a good children's organisation which wants to be excellent but so much about the present system gets in the way. We have no real confidence that measures such as new regional commissioning units will have any role other than to drive the price down and in fact if they try to do anything else we believe that the current market orientation will lead to local authorities bypassing them. Frankly, we do not believe that young people will be able to choose residential care let alone more expensive forms of residential care without major change so far unaccounted for in 'Care Matters'.

We believe that the Green Paper should have acknowledged that good quality residential care :

1. Improves outcomes when it is allowed to work consistently with young people
2. Is expensive because meeting statutory obligations, training and paying staff for work in a 24 hour service costs money .
3. Can be a very positive choice for young people.

We would like the 'next steps' to be :

1. Raised standards, more effective inspection and enforcement to drive out poor quality providers.
2. Research undertaken with both commissioners and providers to

understand the true costs of residential care.

3. A new approach to planning which engages the voluntary and private sector at an early stage.
4. A commitment to 'best value' rather than the cheapest option.
5. An extension of 'choice' so that young people can choose to remain in residential care as well as foster care beyond the age of 18.
6. An inspection regime which challenges local authorities over their misuse of this really important resource for some young people.

13 Should local authorities be required to consider whether disabled children in 52 week specialist residential provision should have the 'looked after' status?

✓ Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

Definitely yes.

Vulnerable children living away from home may well need the protection and the planning framework of the care system.

## Chapter 5: A first class education

14 How might the role of the Designated Teacher for children in care be strengthened further?

### Comments:

We welcome the proposed review of the location of children in care in schools to be undertaken as part of the two yearly report on fair admissions. We believe that any good local authority should aim to place all its children in care in top quartile schools and that any top school worthy of the designation should relish the opportunity to help sometimes very bright and often very resilient young people overcome major setbacks in their lives. Schools should feel privileged and distinguished that they have been thought good enough to educate children who have the local authority as their parent.

The role of the designated teacher would be strengthened if schools were inspected with regard to the added value they had brought to children in care. Their status would rise in the school because our experience is that when young people in care are really given good educational opportunities they shine

Our experience of running the DfES funded education project in Shaftesbury is that a team of teachers working on an intensive basis with young people, working with schools to amend the curriculum and working with carers to support young people's learning in the home can help young people who have been excluded or absent from school for years to attain GCSE's. Some young people in every local authority will need this sort of intensive intervention from a team who could work closely with the designated teacher perhaps under the direction of the 'virtual headteacher'.

15 How would a 'virtual headteacher' best raise standards for children in care?

### Comments:

The role of virtual headteacher is well set out in paragraph 5.68  
Albeit with the added advantage of the complete backing of their local authority the virtual headteacher would carry out many of the functions of Shaftesbury's education manager under our DfES funded education project. She advocates for young people to gain admission to schools, monitors the educational progress of children in care across a number of schools, develops programmes of support, negotiates changes to timetables and curricula, challenges schools to do better and leads a dedicated team of teachers.  
This model is currently being evaluated by DfES although there is no doubt that it works in improving outcomes in terms of GCSE attainments. With greater backing from Government, local authorities and schools this is a programme which could be rolled out across the whole country.

16 What more can be done to reinforce the educational role of the carer?

Comments:

Raise the status, standing and training of carers to ensure that they have their own personal interest and commitment to education.

Only appoint people to be carers when they can demonstrate such a commitment.

Properly resource care environments so that they can provide rich learning experiences.

Emphasise the need for a cultural change constantly emphasising and exemplifying learning.

17 Are the measures proposed in relation to the Further Education sector sufficient to achieve a step change in outcomes for young people in and leaving care?

Yes

No

✓ Not Sure

Comments:

They look really good.

We completely support proposals :

- For the LSC to take account of the needs of people who have left care up to the age of 25.
- For a new entitlement to a personal adviser up to the age of 25
- To track attainment and progress of young people from Care in FE
- To extend the virtual headteacher role to FE
- To introduce mandatory training for FE principals on children in Care
- To explore the possibility of flexible starting dates
- To introduce flexible learning pathways
- To consult young people in Care and Care leavers
- To not take the EMA into account in determining the level of financial support for a care leaver.

If these proposals are developed they should make a huge difference to young people who stand to benefit greatly from FE to make up for disrupted education in a more informal setting at a time in their lives when they may be more ready to learn.

The crucial underlying issue will be whether young people aged 16 – 25 can

have the stability of placement and consistency of support to underpin their education during these crucial years.

## Chapter 6: Life outside school

18 Have we set out the right features in the comprehensive model of health care for children in care?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

As a high quality provider of residential care Shaftesbury employ two health professionals, a health promotion worker and a psychologist. While we strongly support the proposal that every child in care should have a named health professional to help ensure their needs are being met we feel that this will be a nominal role unless key providers actually employ someone directly who can then ensure that crucial mainstream services 'wraparound' a relatively small number of very needy children in care

19 What more could we do to help young people in care to participate in sporting, leisure and cultural activities?

Comments:

As one of our young people has said 'What if your Mam and Dad had all the money that the Council has; what sort of life could they give you ?' If every local authority really valued young people for whom they are the corporate parent there is simply no end to the rich variety of sporting, leisure, employment, volunteering and cultural activities which they could provide. Young people in Care would amply repay such investment by becoming excellent ambassadors for their local Council. It is impossible to be prescriptive about this at a national level; local authorities should be encouraged to develop imaginative local schemes utilising their wealth of local resources. They should be celebrated when they do particularly well and roundly criticised for their lack of ambition and imagination if they let their young people down. With far fewer resources Shaftesbury are offering experiences at our own outdoor pursuits centre to all our young people, promoting opportunities to gain qualifications in adventurous activities, celebrating every achievement, offering opportunities to mentor and volunteer to all.

20 Is the approach to supporting children in care who enter youth custody the right one?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

We completely agree :

1. That local authorities should be required to carry out an assessment of the needs of those young people in their care on a voluntary basis who enter youth custody with the expectation that they will continue to be supported as a child in care.
2. That support and preparation for adult life is provided by the local authority to young people in care aged 16 or over during their time in custody or the secure estate just as it would be for any other child in care.

As previously stated we believe that there should be an expectation that any child under the age of 18 should be looked after in a care setting.

21 What more can be done to support the role of carers in managing behaviour within the home?

Comments:

Shaftesbury staff already receive comprehensive training on managing behaviour within homes utilising restorative justice techniques to avoid the inappropriate involvement of the police.

We certainly agree that all such approaches should be built into the comprehensive framework of training and qualifications envisaged by Care Matters.

## Chapter 7: Making the transition to adult life

22 Should young people be allowed to remain with their foster families up to the age of 21, including when the young person is at university?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

Young people should also be allowed to remain in their long term residential care placements until 21 where this is appropriate. This would still mean that young people would be leaving their homes much earlier than the average of the general population. My general principle evolved over 25 years experience of the care system is that 'the longer you keep them the better chance they've got.'

23 What is the best way of ensuring greater availability of dedicated supported accommodation for young people making the transition to adulthood?

Comments:

Shaftesbury would like to take part in the evaluation of existing models of supported housing for care leavers.  
We are a significant provider of supported housing for care leavers working with local authorities and housing associations in Medway, South London and Suffolk and funding projects from a combination of supporting people, local authority contracts and rents. We provide high standards of accommodation and support and can demonstrate good outcomes in terms of education, employment and training and helping young people to move successfully to their own independent accommodation.

24 Are there other ways in which we can increase the number of children in care progressing to university?

Comments:

We entirely support all the proposals in Care Matters to :

- Introduce a national bursary
- Give young people a choice of vacation accommodation – including residential care if necessary.
- Target young people through Aim Higher
- Work with OFFA and Higher Education Institutions to promote the Quality Mark, information on bursaries, provide mentoring, train key staff and have someone in post in HEI's to support care leavers.

We should aim to maintain young people in long term placements whether foster care or residential care until they have completed A levels or equivalent.

We should raise the expectations of everyone working in the system that just as the national target is for 50% of under 25's going into HE by 2010 so it should be for care leavers.

Chapter 8: Making the system work

25 Should we introduce a new power for local authorities to intervene in schools performing poorly for children in care?

✓ Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

No comment necessary.

26 What more should we do to give children in care a greater say in decisions which affect them?

Comments:

A 'Children in Care Council' is a useful suggestion although the existence of such a body should never preclude the involvement of young people from the care system in mainstream participation activities and the work of the UK Youth Parliament.

The single most important organisation for children and young people in Care is A National Voice – the national organisation run by young people in care and staffed by people with care experience.

We will never be able to claim that we have a care system which gives young people a say if we fail to ensure that ANV is well funded and that it involves young people from every authority across the land.

Local Authorities should be evaluated on their ability to be good corporate parents in part by the evidence of their commitment to funding and supporting the participation of their young people in A National Voice.

27 How can Independent Reviewing Officers be made more independent and their role strengthened?

Comments:

Independent Reviewing Officers cannot possibly exercise the required independence when they are employed and managed by local authorities.

Transferring them to CAF/CASS would guarantee this as well as benefiting them through closer professional relationships with Children's Guardians

28 What key outcomes should we measure to assess whether we are being successful in transforming the lives of children and young people in care?

Comments:

Of course we should focus heavily on educational attainment and strive to ensure that care leavers feature positively in all the statistics to the same level as the general population.

We should work closely with A National Voice and the Care Leavers Association to evaluate the experience of young people leaving care and follow up cohorts of care leavers in the future.

We should enlist the support of the Office of National Statistics to identify the overall number of care leavers in the population and ask them to delineate care leavers (not just those who may have had some care experience) in all the many studies undertaken of the general population. When the proportion of care leavers achieving any form of success starts to equate to their proportion of the overall population we can start to think that we have transformed the care system.

As a former M.P. I am in touch with a number of care leavers across the country who want to become Members of Parliament. It is a personal goal to help at least one of them to be elected within the next 10 years.

29 Please use this space for any general comments you would like to make

Comments:

I believe that Care Matters is an important document which is on the right lines. If it is strengthened in the way that we suggest the 'Next Steps' document can really set out the ways in which the whole care system can be transformed over the years ahead.

It would be conventional to call for more funding at this stage. In fact I would argue that the funding is there. It is the political and professional will which is needed and the patience to work consistently to achieve change over a generation.

One way in which Care Matters seems to divert from the mainstream of Government thinking is in the lack of attention which it gives to the role of the voluntary and private sector. To lose the opportunity for really creative partnerships across public, private and voluntary sectors would be a colossal mistake undermining good practice, stifling creativity and avoiding the sort of healthy challenge needed to bring about change over time.

30 Please let us have your views on responding to this consultation. For instance did you have any difficulty understanding any of the questions and did you think we had the right number or type of questions?

Comments:

I think that this is a worthy consultation and wish you well in evaluating the responses

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

**Please acknowledge this reply X**

Here at the Department for Education and Skills we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, would it be alright if we were to contact you again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

✓ Yes  No

All UK national public consultations are required to conform to the following standards:

1. Consult widely throughout the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.
2. Be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.
3. Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.
4. Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy.
5. Monitor your department's effectiveness at consultation, including through the use of a designated consultation co-ordinator.
6. Ensure your consultation follows better regulation best practice, including carrying out a Regulatory Impact Assessment if appropriate.

Further information on the Code of Practice can be accessed through the Cabinet Office Website: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/regulation/consultation-guidance/content/introduction/index.asp>

**Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.**

Completed questionnaires and other responses should be sent to the address shown below by 15 January 2007

Send by post to: Consultation Unit, Area 1A, Castle View House, East Lane, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 2GJ

Send by e-mail to: [carematters.consultation@dfes.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:carematters.consultation@dfes.gsi.gov.uk)