

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CABINET
MONDAY 18 DECEMBER 2000 AT 9.30 A.M.**

Agenda Item No:

7

**QUALITY PROTECTS MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN AND SPECIAL
GRANT: 2001/2002**

Report of the Director of Social Services

Author: Andrew Wellington, Planning and Commissioning Manager
(Children and Families) (Tel. 01707 280750)

Executive Member: Derrick Ashley

1. Purpose of Report

The report sets out:

- the requirements of LAC Circular (2000) 22 for the preparation of the Quality Protects Management Action Plan (MAP) for 2001/2002
- the County Council's arrangements in response to the above
- the budget proposals for the 2001/2002 Special Grant

The Cabinet's proposals will be considered by the Children's, Schools and Families Select Committee on 24 January 2001. Their comments will be submitted to the Cabinet on 29 January 2001. The MAP and Special Grant budget proposals agreed by Cabinet and the Executive Committee have to be submitted to the Department of Health on 31 January 2001.

2. Summary of Report

- 2.1 The national Quality Protects programme is beginning to fulfil its aim – to transform services and outcomes for the most vulnerable children across the country. The aim is for every local authority to achieve year on year improvements in their children's services, and in outcomes for looked after children and children in need, from the baseline year 1998. Initially a three-year programme, the Secretary of State for Health, has now announced its extension to a five-year programme, running to 2004.

- 2.2 Local authorities are required to submit their third Quality Protects MAP to the Department of Health by 31 January 2001. The County Council has only just received the format for our Quality Protects MAP 2001/2002 from the Department of Health. It is planned to attach the MAP as Appendix 3 to the report when it goes to CSF Select Committee on 24 January 2001, and returns to Cabinet on 29 January. The report explains how the County Council has involved Members in its preparation. It also sets out how other agencies, the voluntary sector, and young people and their families, have been consulted, and how they will be involved in its future development.
- 2.3 In 2001/2002 Hertfordshire will receive approximately £2.564 million Special Grant. This is a £890,000 increase on the £1.674m received in 2000/2001. Two parts of the total grant are earmarked for specific purposes. On 8 December 2000 the Government announced that implementation of the Children (Leaving Care) Act, which was due for implementation in April 2001, has been postponed until October 2001. £456,000 of the Special Grant has been ring-fenced for planning for the implementation of the Act. In addition, a minimum of £214,000 has also to be ring fenced, to ensure that local authorities plan expenditure on the new priority area of services for disabled children. Paragraph 7.A in Appendix 1 shows that we are planning to spend almost four times that amount on disabled children, and have reduced main grant proposals (on priority areas 1 -6) by a corresponding amount.
- 2.4 Special Grant has to be spent against the Government's priority areas. The eight priority areas from 2000/2001 have been retained in 2001/2002, although Management Information and Quality Assurance have now been combined into one priority area. One new priority area has been added for 2001/2002-services for disabled children. A description of the eight priority areas is set out in paragraph 3.3. The County Council's proposed expenditure items, with supporting reasons, are set out against the priority areas in Appendix 1. The numbering of these items matches the numbering in the spreadsheet in Appendix 2, which sets out the amounts we are proposing to spend against each priority area item, with business cases.

1. Preparation of the Management Action Plan for 2001/2002

- 1.1 LAC Circular (2000) 22 was issued in November 2000. This Circular takes forward the Government's Quality Protects programme for transforming children's services, that was launched in Autumn 1998, and announces its extension to 2004. It gives details of the children's services Special Grant for 2001-02 and sets out the Government's requirements for the submission of Quality Protects Management Action Plans (MAPs), on which grants to individual authorities for 2001-02 will depend. The Circular:
- explains the priority areas for special grant in 2001-02;
 - highlights issues to which authorities should give particular attention;
 - sets out the criteria against which the MAPs will be evaluated and the process which will be used
 - asks local authorities to set out in their MAPs what has been achieved in implementing the MAP for 2000-01, and their updated plans for 2001-02.
- 1.2 Local authorities are required to submit their third Quality Protects MAP to the Department of Health by 31 January 2001. The MAP should show how councils will work towards the achievement of the eleven Government Objectives for Children's Social Services (GOCSS). The GOCSS – and therefore the MAPs – cover all services for children in need – particularly those on the children protection register, those in care and disabled children – not just to those services funded through the grant. The aim is for every local authority to achieve year on year improvements in their children's services, and in outcomes for looked after children and children in need, from the baseline year 1998. Every council is required to set their own targets up to 2004 against a range of performance indicators under these Objectives, so as to demonstrate continuous improvement. Their progress is monitored through the Social Services Performance Assessment System, of which Quality Protects is an integral element.
- 1.3 The MAP should be accompanied by a joint letter from the Chief Executives of the Council and the Health Authority and the Director of Social Services and the Chief Education Officer (or equivalents). The letter should show that the MAP has been endorsed by the Leader of the Council and by the lead members with executive responsibility for social services and education and that all relevant services are aware of the MAP and are committed to its implementation. The County Council's proposed Member consultation process is as follows:
- 7 December 2000: draft report and budget proposals considered by Corporate Parenting Panel
 - 18 December 2000: initial report and budget proposals to Cabinet and Executive Committee
 - 24 January 2001: report with MAP and budget proposals to be considered by CSF Select Committee
 - 29 January 2000: MAP and budget proposals to be signed off by Cabinet and Executive Committee.

1.4 In addition, the following areas of Quality Protects have been the subject of reports to Corporate Parenting Panel, and/or special Member briefings, during the year 2000:

- Foster Care Standards
- Educational achievements of looked after SEN Children
- the new Assessment Framework for Children in Need
- Consultation with Looked After Children (including a presentation from some of the young people themselves)
- Adoption
- Health of Looked After Children
- Education of Children in Public Care
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- Residential Children's Homes
- District Council links with Quality Protects

1.5 The County Council is also asked to set out what it has done to consult the voluntary sector in drawing up the MAP and explain how children, young people, their families and carers have been involved in the planning process. The County Council is also asked to consider how other agencies and front-line staff should be involved in the development of the MAP. Local authorities are required to ensure that MAPs are public documents that are made available to anyone who wishes to see them:

- The first MAP 1999/2000 was issued to an extensive mailing list of voluntary organisations and other agencies across the County. Feedback was relatively limited although agencies welcomed the extra attention and additional resources that were being put into children's services through the Quality Protects initiative.
- The second MAP 2000/2001 was published with Committee documents in January 2000. This MAP has subsequently been put on the "Herts Direct" website.
- Recently, two workshops were held for voluntary organisations from across the County, which looked at the aims of Quality Protects and what voluntary organisations want to see arising from the programme. These workshops also considered the Education Development and Early Years Plans, and the CSF Preventative Strategy, and the links between these different initiatives.
- Where relevant, representatives of Education, Careers and Health, and of voluntary organisations, have been members of the various Quality Protects planning groups that have been set up, to take forward different aspects of the programme.
- Representatives from the two Health Authorities, NHS Community Trusts, and Primary Care Groups, have been involved with officers from Social Services and Education in taking forward Quality Protects, through the Children's Joint Commissioning Board and other forums. One of our aims has been to ensure consistency between our Quality Protects objectives and relevant objectives set out in the Health Improvement Plans, Behaviour

Support and Education Development Plans, the Early Years Development and Childcare Plan, and Youth Justice and Drug Action Plans.

- Throughout this year, first-line managers, Senior Practitioners, and front-line staff have been informed and consulted about Quality Protects. This has been through dedicated training days, the biennial child care manager summits, items at managers' countywide meetings, and presentations to team meetings by members of the Quality Protects Planning Group.

2. Listening to Children and Families

- 2.1 The Government specifically requests that the MAP sets out how children and young people have been involved in its development. The County Council has a Quality Protects "Listening to Children" strategy, to consult looked after children about our services. The main developments of the "Listening to Children" strategy in the year 2000 are set out below.
- 2.2 Piloting DoH Training Pack: in March, Members, planning manager, district, residential, training section and foster carers were involved in piloting the training course "Total Respect - Children's Participation" put together by CROA (Children's Rights Officers and Advocates) and young people on behalf of the DoH.
- 2.3 Voice of the Child in Residential: a monthly county wide group has been developed, which considers topics including "consistency in homes", "internet access" and "pocket and clothes money." Guests are invited at the request of the young people. In addition, residential unit meetings are held weekly in all children's homes. Items for discussion have included police liaison, menus, visitor treatment and bullying. These meetings also discuss other issues regarding the running of the home.
- 2.4 Children's, Schools and Family Service: small groups and individuals were consulted about the changes. Views varied, but individuals raised concerns about "too many people knowing a young person's history" and agreeing that "Social services and schools working together could be helpful."
- 2.5 Viewpoint: multi-media computer software for consulting with young people. Following the successful Viewpoint pilot, when a sample of 46 looked after children in residential and foster care were consulted about services, we have bought a perpetual licence for wide usage. Viewpoint is currently being piloted as an alternative to the DoH LAC consultation booklet, which is designed to obtain information from young people for Statutory Reviews, but has a very low take up rate. Viewpoint not only gathers information on an individual care plan basis, but also collates it for service development. The Product also has set questions for "Reviews", "New to Care" and "Care Leavers". Next year this programme will be made available to 350 young people aged 9-16.
- 2.6 Focus Groups: 15 focus groups were held across the county with residential, family placement, care leavers. Mostly they were organised by CROA

(Children's Rights Officers and Advocates). CROA are training some of the County Council's young people to help facilitate focus groups in the future. In addition, the Race Equality Unit are aiming to hold a group for black and other minority ethnic LAC. A report from CROA about the outcomes of the focus groups will be presented to Corporate Parenting Panel.

- 2.7 Advocacy Service: the Voice of the Child in Care contract was started in April this year. VCC have recruited staff and the service is now fully operational. Their role is to provide advocacy services for individual looked after children, and next year they will be developing Children's Interest groups.
- 2.8 Corporate Parenting Panel Presentation: on June 30th, Corporate Parenting Panel Members were given a presentation using video, drama and discussion opportunities with children who are looked after. The Panel were given a list of suggestions, put together by young people and CROA following the focus groups, as to how the County Council might change the way children are cared for. The Panel subsequently agreed to a "Promise Card" setting out the County Council's undertakings to all looked after young people,
- 2.9 Event Day for Looked After Children (Oct 15th): following the successful National Voice Day in August 1999, a day event for Hertfordshire looked after children was held, arranged by CROA and some Hertfordshire young people. It was 'activity' led and offered an enjoyable atmosphere for encouraging young people's participation. The reply by the Chairman of Corporate Parent Panel to the children/young people's suggestions was given, and recorded on video, with the Promise Cards and a newsletter to follow.
- 2.10 In addition to consultation with looked after children, our family support centres have recently carried out a consultation exercise with families using their services. The results of this exercise will be reported under Objective 8 in the MAP.
- 2.11 We will be consulting a small group of children who have been involved in the focus groups about the content of the MAP. By April 2001 we will also publish a short, easy to read version that can be distributed to young people and families, and to a wider audience of voluntary organisations and other agencies.

3. Special Grant 2001/2002

- 3.1 In 2001/2002 Hertfordshire will receive approximately £2.564 million Special Grant. This is a £890,000 increase on the £1.674m received in 2000/2001. Two parts of the total grant are earmarked for specific purposes. On 8 December 2000 the Government announced that implementation of the Children (Leaving Care) Act, which was due for implementation in April 2001, has been postponed until October 2001. £456,000 of the Special Grant has been ring-fenced for planning for the implementation of the Act. In addition, a minimum of £214,000 has also to be ring fenced, to ensure that

local authorities plan expenditure on the new priority area of services for disabled children. Paragraph 7.A in Appendix 1 shows that we are planning to spend almost four times that amount on disabled children, and have reduced main grant proposals (on priority areas 1 -6) by a corresponding amount.

3.2 **Priority Areas**

Special Grant has to be spent against the Government's priority areas. The eight priority areas from 2000/2001 have been retained in 2001/2002, although Management Information and Quality Assurance have now been combined into one priority area. One new priority area has been added for 2001/2002-services for disabled children. Priority areas have also been aligned more closely to the Government Objectives for Children's Social Services (GOCSS). The alignment of priority categories to GOCSS does not, of course, mean that expenditure under one priority category will not contribute towards other objectives. For example, improved assessment (Objective 7) will clearly help progress towards other objectives, such as child protection (Objective 2).

3.3 The eight Priority Areas are as follows:

1. Placement Choice: Increasing the choice of adoption, foster and residential placements for looked after children. As requested by the DoH, the spreadsheet separately identifies planned expenditure on adoption (section 1 B).
2. Assessment: Improving assessment, planning and record keeping.
3. Quality Assurance and Management Information: Enhancing the development and use of management information systems, and improving quality assurance systems.
4. Participation of Children and Families: Participation of children, young people and their families in the planning and delivery of services and in decisions about their day-to-day lives.
5. Life Chances of Looked After Children: Improving the life chances of looked after children.
6. Managing Change: Human Resource issues, including training and development.
7. Services for Disabled Children: Improving provision for disabled children.
8. Leaving Care: Services to ensure implementation of the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act.

3.4 The County Council's proposed expenditure items, with supporting reasons, are set out against the priority areas in Appendix 1. The numbering of these items matches the numbering in the spreadsheet in Appendix 2, which sets out the amounts it is proposed to spend against each priority area item, with business cases. New proposals for 2001/2 are shown with 3* against them in the spreadsheet.

- 3.5 It should be noted that the County Council has already approved a number of the proposals, when they signed off the first two MAPs in January 1999 and January 2000. Some of these developments were not due to commence until 2001/2002, and these proposals are shown with 2* against them in the spreadsheet. Some other items represent the additional amounts required for full-year funding in 2001/2002. As last year, the increase in Children's SSA for 2001/2002 has meant that all the 2000/2001 Special Grant funding, for projects commenced this year, can be absorbed into the 2001/2002 core budget. However, some of these projects were planned to start up part-way through the financial year and so only part-year costs were allocated in 2000/2001. For these developments, the expenditure laid out shows the difference between the part-year costs incurred in 2000/2001 (to be absorbed into the core budget in 2001/2002), and the full-year costs of the projects in 2001/2002. These proposals are shown with 1* against them in the spreadsheet.

4. Financial Implications

All the financial proposals outlined in this report are for spending the Quality Protects Special Grant. They do not otherwise affect the core budget of the Children's, Schools and Families Service for 2001/2. If agreed by Cabinet and Executive Committee, they will be included in the draft Quality Protects Management Action Plan to go to CSF Select Committee on 24 January, and submitted to the Department of Health at the end of January.

Background papers used by the author when compiling this report:

Report to Social Services Committee 7 January 1999: Quality Protects: Transforming Children's Services

Report to Joint Social Services and Education Committee 26 January 2000: Quality Protects Management Action Plan and Special Grant: 2000/2001

Department of Health: Circular LAC (2000) 22 *The Quality Protects Programme: Transforming Children's Services 2000/01* (November 2000)

If you would like to know more about the issues referred to in this report please contact Andrew Wellington (Tel: 01707 280750)

**PROPOSED SPECIAL GRANT EXPENDITURE AGAINST
THE EIGHT PRIORITY AREAS**

Note

In this Appendix, where paragraphs have a number followed by a letter (1.A.1, etc) they are introductory paragraphs to each priority area. These paragraphs explain which of the Quality Protects Government Objectives for Children's Social Services (GOCSS) the priority area is expected to develop. They also set out what the Government expects us to spend the grant on in that priority area. Paragraphs with two numbers (1.1 etc) correspond to the expenditure proposals in the Appendix 2 spreadsheet with the same number. Some of these proposals contain more than one expenditure item. In these cases, the number is followed by a series of small letters (1.1 a) etc) in both this appendix and the spreadsheet, each one denoting a separate item of expenditure.

1.A Placement Choice

1.A.1 This Priority Area, which relates to GOCSS Objective 1, is about increasing the choice of adoption, foster and residential placements for looked after children. The aim is to reduce the number of changes of main carer for children looked after by increasing the number and range of placements available to children, so that they can be appropriately placed first time around. The Government requests that particular attention is given to the new PSA target to maximise the potential of adoption as a placement option for looked after children, to the recruitment of adoptive parents and foster carers; and to the implementation of the foster care standards and the Code of Practice. Within this priority, the County Council is asked to separately identify planned expenditure on adoption.

1.A.2 The aim is to extend placement choice within the County by developing in-house fostering and residential resources for hard to place children with complex needs, including children with disability, which will act as an alternative to out-County Agency placements. Nationally, placement stability is increasing, with the proportion of looked after children experiencing three or more placements in 1999/2000 dropping to 17.8% from 19.6% in 1997/98. However, there were wide variations between councils so there is still a way to go to meet the placement stability target that no more than 16% of looked after children *in any council* should have three or more placements a year. In Hertfordshire the figures have been revised in line with new guidance on collecting these statistics. They show the proportion in 1999/2000 dropping to 8% from 13% in 1997/98. This is expected to fall further, to 6% in 2000/1, well ahead of the national average and the Government target of 16%.

1.A.3 In common with the rest of the country, over the last five years there has been a steady increase in the numbers of looked after children (LAC) in Hertfordshire. Analysis shows that this is due, not to more children coming into the system, but to them leaving the system more slowly. Last year the "LAC Exit Strategy" was put in place, to move children out of the Care system quicker through more assertive care planning. This year this Strategy has begun to be successful. Having increased to 843 in March 2000, the LAC numbers have subsequently dropped to the same level as this time last year (804 children as at the end of October 2000). Many of the proposed expenditure items are aimed at maximising the impact of this strategy, the main elements of which are:

- early rehabilitation for those who are able to go home,
- kinship placements with extended family and significant others, to enlarge the pool of available placements both inside and outside the LAC system
- quicker adoption for children who need a permanent placement

1.1 **Fostering**

Three years ago, the Joint SSI/Audit Commission Review Report noted that the proportion of Hertfordshire's Looked After Children in foster placements had been low compared to average, but this was changing. The aim has been to meet all the projected increase in looked after children through fostering, and by March 2000 we had already met our 2002 target percentage of 77%. This is significantly ahead of the national and shire county average, and our aim is to raise it to 80% by 2004. However, although Fostering teams have met their recruitment targets, maintaining the pool is a constant challenge as there is a steady turnover of foster carers. This is accentuated by the adoption strategy because, to maintain placement stability, we support long-term foster carers in adopting the children they are looking after. In 2001/2 we are proposing to focus our spending on maintaining placement stability, developing emergency placements, and enhancing the system to meet demands at the pressure points:

- a) Foster carers are moving to independent agencies because they provide advice and support out of hours, in addition to higher payments. In January 1999 Committee agreed to fund 2.0 Support Foster Carers and the development of 24-hour support in 2000/2002. This will help to prevent foster placement breakdown, thus contributing to the 6% placement stability target. It will also aid the retention of foster carers. The development of the joint child and adolescent mental health Support Service to looked after children this year, using CAMHS MH Grant and Modernisation Fund monies, will also enhance the "wrap around" support to foster carers.
- b) The Fostering team that covers the West quadrant has the highest number of foster placements of the four Fostering teams, and has no capacity for additional recruitment and support work. An additional 0.5 wte social worker is required to bring their ratio of carers and placements per worker into line with the rest of the County. This will help meet placement stability and fostering recruitment targets.

- c) The fostering recruitment strategy requires a high degree of co-ordination and collection and analysis of management information. An additional 0.5 wte central administrative person is required to support this work. This will support the recruitment process and the work to meet Foster Care Standards.
- d) It is planned to develop an Emergency Carer Service, consisting of four carers (one per quadrant) who could provide emergency placements for up to 10 days. This would be for children who are need emergency placements for child protection reasons, or for young people who are held in police custody. Carers would be recruited who could take all ages. They would be supported by Fostering Project outreach service.

1.2 **Permanent Fostering**

For many children adoption is not easy to achieve, but they still have a need for permanency in their lives. January 1999 Committee agreed to fund five enhanced permanent placements in 2001/2002, and three in each subsequent year, for children with complex needs. This is to help move on children with complex needs, e.g. disability, waiting for permanent placements. This development not only provides long-term security to children with complex needs, it also frees up valuable short-term foster placements.

1.3 **Residential Family Assessment Service**

Last year Committee agreed to expand the Residential Family Assessment Unit at Bengoe, using a neighbouring house on the site. This has increased the capacity to support a third family, and to provide space for Health clinical support sessions. The SSI Inspection of our Children's Services noted the development of Bengoe as a significant multi-agency initiative. They felt that it demonstrated the use of Best Value principles, in that it was both cheaper and more local than out-County alternatives. They were particularly impressed by the input of the child psychiatrist from the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Clinic, which is funded from joint finance.

1.4 **Kinship Placements**

A significant new development in the year 2000 has been the Kinship Strategy. This involves locating extended family and "significant others" who are willing to take in children who cannot live with their nuclear families. This has the advantage of keeping many children out of the looked after system, and expanding the pool of carers for those who enter it. For both, our aim is to encourage the kinship carer to apply for a Residence Order, should the child remain with them for longer than six months. We currently have about 80 kinship placements, although they are not distributed evenly across the County. A kinship policy has been developed and training has been held for social workers. Our aim is to expand the use of kinship by about 20 looked after placements, and 48 non-looked after placements, a year.

- a) It is necessary that kinship placement meet the statutory requirements of the National Standards for Foster Care. In order to do so, the Fostering Teams will need to take over support for 80 existing placements (currently held in District Teams) and assessment of about 20 new placements per

year. They will also encourage the use of Residence Orders when appropriate and support carers through the process. 4.0 wte social workers (one in each team) will be required in the Fostering Teams to do this.

- b) An additional 0.5 wte admin worker per quadrant Fostering Team is required to support the administrative requirements of this work, and to free up Fostering Team social workers to support carers and placements.
- c) An increase to Quadrant Team Section 17 (children in need) budgets will be required to fund the target of 48 non-LAC kinship placements a year (12 per quadrant). It is planned to achieve turnover on this funding by encouraging carers to apply for Residence Orders.

1.5 Early Rehabilitation of Looked After Children

Research identifies that Looked After Children are most likely to be rehabilitated home in the first month after being accommodated. This is a key element of our LAC Exit Strategy. Children's homes have identified children who could return home if the rehabilitation work was carried out quickly, but our own social work teams have found it difficult to make time to do this work, due to their other commitments such as child protection. Accordingly, some of this work has been referred to the NCH Over Tens Family Support Service, who have helped rehabilitate some children home. However, they are not funded to carry out this work, which was added to the Specification after the Contract was placed. An additional 4.0 wte NCH social workers are required for this work (one in each of the NCH Quadrant-based teams). This will also free up social work time in our own Quadrant Teams in 2001/2, to enable them to do more work with other client groups.

1.B Adoption

The Quality Protects Objectives are to maximise the contribution adoption can make to providing permanent families, and to reduce the period children remain looked after before they are placed for adoption or in long term foster care. 5% of our looked after children were placed for adoption in 1999/2000 (ahead of the national and shire county average). Our Local Performance Plan objective is to raise this to 6% by 2001 and 7% by 2002. So far this year we have achieved 20 adoptions, and 33 have adoption hearing dates before the end of March. A further 21 adoption applications have been lodged with the Courts but no hearing dates have been fixed yet. Achievement of our target of 6% of LAC adopted in 2000/2001 will be dependent upon the Courts hearing most of these cases by the end of March. It is also necessary to point out that the length of time that children are looked after before they are adopted is getting longer. Paradoxically, this is partly due to the success of the Adoption teams recently in achieving adoption for hard-to-place children. These are mainly disabled children, for whom we had been searching for adoptive placements for some years.

- 1.6 To achieve the above aims, we need to considerably increase our Homefinding efforts. The enquiries from prospective adopters have doubled in the last 2 years. In addition, our targets for assessment of adopters have increased from 40 in 1999/00 to 55 in 2000/01 and 60 in 2001/ 02. These targets are likely to

be revised upwards when we receive the new Government adoption targets, which are expected shortly.

- a) January 2000 Committee agreed two additional Adoption Team SWs for Homefinding. The full year effect costs of these posts has been included in the 2001/2 budget.
- b) We also need increased admin support to meet the demand of processing applications - two half-time admin workers for each of the Long Term/Adoption Teams. This will also free up social workers' time to find more adoption placements.

1.7 Adoption Allowances

To attract adopters for children with especially challenging needs we need to pay adoption allowances. We have identified 25 such children where we will need to be more generous on the adoption allowance assessment. We also plan to secure stability for 8 children by converting their existing long-term foster placements to adoption placements. These placements would not be sustainable without the payment of adoption allowances.

1.8 Post-Adoption Support

Post-Adoption support is essential if adoption placements of more challenging children are to be maintained. Research shows that up to 50% of teenage adoption placements break down. Currently we have no formally dedicated Post Adoption support. Although Adoption teams are able to respond to all requests for support, this work is very patchy and reactive, and is at the expense of their homefinding work. This is an area which needs development and which was subject to a motion by Social Services Committee in November 1999 following presentation of the Adoption Agency Annual report. Questionnaires surveyed prospective adopters and the response confirms the view that developing this work is long overdue and a priority if we are to encourage adopters to take more hard to place children. We propose to put together a dedicated post-adoption team, consisting of the following:

- a) A Co-ordinator to develop the work and identify capacity/ demand, and work with partner agencies on policy / procedures etc. This post will enhance stability of adoption placements and help prevent adopted children return to the LAC system.
- b) Two half-time social workers focussing on S51 (birth record) counselling and Letter Box contact respectively.
- c) Two half-time admin workers. Currently there is no dedicated admin support to post adoption work. The Co-ordinator and social workers will need additional admin support if their time is to be focussed on development work and client contact.

2. Assessment

- 2.1 This Priority Area reflects Objective 7 - improving assessment, planning and record keeping. We are asked to give particular attention to the inter-agency implementation of the new *Framework for Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* and *Working Together to Safeguard Children*. These guidelines, which are currently being piloted and are due for full implementation in April 2001, impose new timescales and targets for setting outcomes that will impact heavily on Quadrant Teams. We are proposing to meet the training costs in 2001/2 for all staff in the new CSF Service whom have not received training in 2000/2001 (including staff currently employed in the Education Dept.).

3. Quality Assurance and Management Information

- 3.A This Priority Area reflects that part of Objective 11 which deals with enhancing the development and use of management information systems, and improving quality assurance systems to ensure that services are delivered according to requirements and are meeting local and national objectives; and developing financial management strategies. We are asked to pay attention to how information systems, as they develop, are designed and used to help control for procedural and practice compliance and hence underpin quality assurance.

3.1 Quality Assurance

The Social Services' QUIP system has been implemented far more successfully in Children's Services than in the District Teams. This is because we have had a time-limited seconded officer who has worked with children's homes and family support centres in particular, to develop the system and ensure that it is integrated into care practice. The award of ISO 9002 for our children's homes was national recognition of the success of this work. A new Quality Management (QM) framework is being developed for the CSF Service, which will incorporate all the best elements of QUIP, and of the Education Department's quality assurance systems. We are proposing the creation of a post of Quality Assurance Officer, to work alongside managers and staff in the Quadrant Teams and the other operational units, to help them implement this new QM framework. This officer will develop the links between QM and Management information at team/ unit level especially via the 'team metrics' process which the QM framework is introducing.

3.2 Management Information

There is a vast amount of activity being carried out every day on children's services, but there is concern that local authorities have few systems for monitoring it, and reporting it to their Members, and to the Government. This in turn impedes strategic planning for the improvement of services. One of the issues that we identified last year was the inconsistent inputting of information on SSIS by the Districts, particularly around the LAC system. This caused problems when we needed aggregate information on our looked after children numbers and activity. The increasing complexity of child care frameworks issued by the Government, and the Quality Protects requirements on us to set

up and maintain rigorous monitoring systems, has meant that social workers spend more of their time on administrative tasks. Accordingly January 2000 Committee agreed that we recruit ten additional Team Administrators in District Teams. These posts have been extremely successful in carrying out administrative tasks and IT inputting, and have freed up valuable social work practitioner time for more client-contact. Full year effect costs of these posts are required in 2001/2, when they will be transferred to the CSF Quadrant Teams.

4. Participation of Children and Families

4.A This Priority Area reflects Objective 8 - participation of children, young people and their families in the planning and delivery of services and in decisions about their day-to-day lives. We are asked to give particular attention to the involvement of young people collectively and to enhancing their individual voices, for example through the development of independent advocacy services.

4.1 Advocacy Service

Development of an independent Advocacy Service for our looked after children was first recommended by the 1997 Joint Review, and was included in the developments identified for 2000/2001 in the Quality Protects MAP. It has been subsequently highlighted by the SSI inspection of Children's Services. The Contract for the service was placed with Voice of the Child in Care, who are the national leaders in the field and the service commenced this year. Full year effect costs of the service are required in 2001/2.

4.2 Independent Visiting Service

The Children Act requires us to offer Independent Visitors to looked after children who have lost contact with their families of origin. To date, this has been arranged on an ad-hoc basis, which has proved unsatisfactory. The absence of an organised service was a source of concern to the SSI inspection of Children's Services. We originally packaged this service with the Advocacy Service, when we tendered the first time. However, it became clear that some organisations would not tender for both services, and that those who did were offering no particular expertise or economies of scale for the Independent Visiting service. Consequently, it has been decided that our own Fostering service, which has the experience and systems to recruit, assess, and train such people, should provide the service. Revised estimates have shown that a further amount will be required for this service, on top of the sum agreed in the 2000/1 MAP.

4.3 Listening to Children

So far, our Listening to Children Strategy has been one of the most successful elements of our Quality Protects programme. Section 2 of this report outlines our efforts in this area. In 2001/2 we plan to continue this work with looked after children, develop the work that has been started with family support services, and extend the strategy to schools and further education centres through the Children's Schools and Families Service.

- a) We need 1.0 wte Professional Assistant to carry out preparation and groupwork with young people and families, foster carers and staff. In 1999/2000 and 2000/1 this role has been carried out by seconded staff and has been instrumental in the success of the Listening to Children Strategy.
- b) We will continue to run consultation focus groups and participation events with looked after children, and extend the Listening to Children Strategy to Children in need through the Family Support Service. In 1999/2000 and 2000/1 this work has included the CROA and REU focus groups, the LAC Event Days, and the Viewpoint programme. It has been financed from QP budget slippage, which is unlikely to be available in Year 3 now that planned developments are up and running.
- c) We also want to extend the Listening to Children Strategy to children in schools and further education by running consultation groups and participation events and setting up schools councils. Finance will be needed for staff and running costs of this development.

4.4 Celebrating Achievement of Looked After Children

Looked After Children fed back to us that they would like it if we celebrated their achievements. They would also like to receive a present from their social worker on their birthdays, and at Christmas or their most significant festival. Children of different religious faiths will receive presents on the most appropriate festival date. In their feedback to children at the "LAC Event Day" and in the "Promise Cards", Members gave an undertaking to the children that we would meet this request. A small additional amount is needed for each of the four Quadrant Teams, to ensure that this undertaking is adequately funded.

5. Life Chances of Looked After Children

5.A This priority area reflects Objective 4 - improving the life chances of looked after children through expenditure on their education and health needs, reducing offending and more and better cultural, leisure and sports opportunities. Particular attention should be given to implementing the joint DH/DfEE guidance on the education of looked after children, and to reducing teenage pregnancy. However, the DoH Guidance says that expenditure should not substitute for services properly provided by local education authorities and the health service, although expenditure on voluntary sector provision to complement such services is acceptable. We already have the joint-funded post of Nurse for Looked After Children, and a joint finance bid to extend the looked after children Health team to cover care leavers is currently being considered by the Health agencies. We also have four Advisory Teachers whose work is solely focussed on looked after children. In addition, in 2000/1 we have created the new post of Corporate Parenting Officer, who is overseeing the education needs of looked after children and implementing the joint DH/DfEE *Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care*.

5.1 Cultural, Leisure and Sports Opportunities

For young people, achievement is about more than academic achievement. The one Life Chances area that we need to build upon is developing more and better cultural, leisure and sports opportunities for looked after children, and the necessary support to take advantage of those opportunities. This will help to gainfully occupy their leisure time, and enhance their social integration. It will also lead to greater achievements, and so improve their self-esteem. Using the model that has been successful with the Listening to Children Strategy, we propose to fund 1.0 wte Professional Assistant to develop leisure, sports and culture opportunities for looked after children, and support their carers in encouraging them to access these opportunities. This officer will help children to build up links with local sports clubs, and other community leisure facilities, and also enhance their ability to access lifelong learning opportunities. It is proposed that they have a small development budget to enable this to happen.

6. Managing Change

6.A This reflects Objective 10. The Guidance says that expenditure in this priority area should be targeted on human resource issues, communications and on work to strengthen the governance of children's services. Key aspects of HR will include workforce analysis, training and development, effective and safe recruitment, and developing ownership, participation and awareness of multi-agency frontline staff in the Quality Protects programme.

6.1 Senior Practitioners

Last year we said that we had become concerned about the loss of experienced social workers, either to other authorities who are paying more, or because the only way they can earn more is to seek promotion to management posts. To enhance retention of the most experienced social work practitioners in District Teams, the creation of ten additional Senior Practitioner posts in 2001/2002 was agreed by Committee. In addition to their practitioner role, they have been given a Quality Protects lead role within social work teams, to ensure the development of good practice amongst their colleagues, particularly in the area of assessment and care planning. In 2001/2, when these posts will be transferred to the new CSF Quadrant Teams, full year effect costs will be needed.

6.2 Staff Training

Last year we did not ask for any QP expenditure for training. However, we indicated to Committee that, in subsequent years, funds would be required from the Quality Protects grant for training. In 2001/2 these funds will be needed as a contribution to costs of Training courses identified as a priority in Objective 10: NVQ, PQ, Total Respect (Listening to Children), and Towards Safer Care. By March 2001 we are plan that 15% of residential workers will have achieved level 3 NVQ Caring for Children and Young People. By 2002 we aim that this will have risen to 40%, and 85% by 2004. By 2001, we plan that 9.6% of social workers and managers will have achieved the PQ1 award in Childcare, rising to 20% in 2002, and 42% by 2004. In March 2000 we piloted the CROA Total Respect Course for the DoH. The course involves Members, managers, planners, foster carers, and front-line staff. Final guidelines for this course have recently been published and we plan to run three courses in 2001/2.

7. Services for Disabled Children

7.A This reflects Objective 6. It has been made a new priority area for grant this year because of the body of evidence which shows heavy demand pressures and shortcomings in the provision of services. Expenditure should be targetted on increased provision of family support services including short term breaks; better integration of disabled children into mainstream leisure and out of school services; improved information for planning purposes; better information for parents and the increased availability of key workers and other measures to improve co-ordination. Since 1998 we have had a Disabled Children Strategy, funded mainly through a three year joint finance plan. This funding is due to end this year, and January 1999 Committee agreed to Quality Protects picking up the funding of a number of initiatives in the Strategy from 2001/2 onwards. Accordingly, although a minimum of £214,000 has been ring-fenced to ensure that expenditure is targetted on this priority area, we are planning to spend almost four times that amount. Main grant expenditure has been reduced by a corresponding amount.

7.1 Residential Services for Disabled Children

One of the main objectives of the Disabled Children Strategy has been to develop residential services, which were in short supply, particularly in the North of the County. This covers both long-term and respite services.

- a) Mendip Unit - the revenue costs of 3/4 place Residential Respite Care & Resource Centre at Lonsdale School in Stevenage, which opened this year. This is a joint finance funded development, making use of a school residential resource at weekends and in the holidays to meet residential respite care shortfall in the North of County. It will help meet our target of increasing the percentage of looked after children in respite care to 15.5% in 2001, and 18.2% in 2002. January 1999 Committee agreed that Quality Protects would pick up funding of this development from 2001/2.
- b) Ripon Road Long Term Residential Unit - to meet the revenue costs of an 8 Bed long term unit in Stevenage, which is due to open in Summer 2001. Currently our only long-term unit is at the Gables in Hoddesdon, which only has 4 places. Consequently many children are placed out-County, which makes it difficult for their families to keep in touch.
- c) Staff increases for Woolmer Drive (respite home in Hemel Hempstead) and the Gables (see above). When they were transferred to Children's Services last year, it was found that these two existing CWD Residential Homes did not have the staffing levels required by Registration and Inspection Unit.

7.2 Workers for Disabled Children

So far, disabled children have not benefited from the Quality Protects funded increase in workers enjoyed by the mainstream social work service. Current developments outlined below will have the impact of bringing a lot of additional work to Quadrant Teams. The response of our Human Resource strategy to the national shortage of qualified social workers has been to expand the pool by engaging more professional assistants. We propose to recruit 4.0 wte Professional Assistants to the Quadrant Disability teams (one per team). In particular, this would allow them to pick up the review and support functions for children in respite care, which is only being offered to a minimal extent at present. This will help meet statutory review requirements and QP care planning objectives.

7.3 Transition

There is currently no capacity within Children's Disability teams to undertake the required level of work with these young people aged 15-21, to ensure they are supported in the transition to adulthood. At the moment they are falling through the gaps between children's and adults services. Two new wte Transition Worker posts would allow this work to be picked up.

7.4 Children with Complex Behavioural Problems

There are very few respite services for children with ADHD and other complex behaviour problems, and we have had MPs enquiries about this service not being provided. It is currently only provided in south west of County (by Mencap) who provide a family-based support service, funded on a case by case basis. This is an effective service, but is an expensive way of funding it and is resulting in a large overspend on the home care budget. In 2001/2 we would like additional funding for the home care budget, to allow us to develop block contracts for this type of service in each of the four quadrants. This would provide an invaluable service to families who are currently inadequately served, and would also prevent family breakdown.

7.5 Support Services

One of the developments that parents and carers have most appreciated in the last few years is additional funding for places in playschemes, out of school clubs, and leisure services. This has included schemes dedicated to disabled children, as well as funding for additional staffing that allow them to be integrated into mainstream services. These schemes enhance disabled children's quality of life whilst giving respite to parents (thus helping prevent family breakdown). Funding is required to allow us to fund new places in 2001/2.

8. Leaving Care

8.A This is covered by Objective 5. The impact of the implementation of the Children (Leaving Care) Act will be considerable. This is why the Government announced on 8 December 2000 that its implementation has been delayed from April to October 2001. This area has been ring-fenced in the budget (outlined in paragraph 3.1 of the main report). Expenditure will provide for improved support for qualifying children and young people in and leaving care. For each young person this support will be based on a needs assessment, agreed with him and set out in his Pathway Plan, including:

- accommodation and maintenance for those aged 16 and 17;
- general assistance up to the age of 21;
- help with employment up to the age of 21;
- help with education and training to the end of the agreed programme, even if that takes someone past 21;
- provision of vacation accommodation (if needed) for someone in Higher Education or in Further Education which means living away from home;
- provision of young person's advisers to the age of at least 21, or for as long as someone is being helped with education or training.

We have been preparing for the Leaving Care Act since legislation was first mooted and it has been the subject of a number of reports to Corporate Parenting Panel, as well as being included in each of the Quality Protects Committee reports. The developments outlined below will ensure that we are prepared to meet the requirements of the Act when it is implemented.

8.1 NCH Leaving Care Service

As part of our Quality Protects MAP agenda, January 1999 Committee agreed the development of a Leaving Care Service in 2000/2002, in partnership with NCH Action for Children. This will build upon the accommodation services they already run for us that are used by Care Leavers, who have given both ourselves and the SSI inspection of Children's Services very positive feedback about the service. NCH are currently appointing staff to the new service and are preparing themselves to take on case management for care leavers and thus free up social work time in Quadrant Teams to work with other client groups. It is planned that the new service will be fully operational by the time the Bill is implemented in April 2001. In 2001/2 we will require the full year effect costs of this 2000/01 development agreed in 1999/2000 MAP, plus additional costs to ensure that NCH are fully prepared for the implementation of Care Leavers Act in October 2001.

8.2.A **Education, Training and Employment of Care leavers**

New targets, set in the NHS Plan published in July 2000, have increased target for improving the level of education, training and employment outcomes for care leavers aged 19. The aim is that levels for this group are at least 75% of those achieved by all young people in the same area by March 2004 (this is also a Connexions Service target). We are currently achieving 67% for recent care leavers, which exceeds the interim Quality Protects target of 60% of that achieved by all young people in the same area. We aim to achieve the NHS Plan target by 2002. In this, we have been assisted by the success of the "Kick Start" Personal Adviser programme started in April 2000. It is hoped that Connexions will pick up the cost of this service in 2001.

8.2 **Care leavers in Higher and Further Education**

As indicated above the Government expects us to help care leavers with education and training to the end of the agreed programme, even if that takes someone past 21. Currently 40 young people aged 18-21 are in higher and further education. Our aim is to expand this to 60 by 2004. However, many care leavers over 18 drop out of further education because they have inadequate financial support. To support our goal of expanding the numbers in further and higher education, we have developed a policy that identifies the amount of sponsorship the County Council can offer to young people without it affecting their education grant entitlement. We plan to implement this policy in 2001/2, and are proposing funding for this purpose.

8.3 **Care Leavers Access to Records**

The SSI Inspection recommended that we provide access to records for all care leavers. With a predicted increase of approximately 100 applications from Care Leavers additional resources will be required to manage this new service to a high standard and grant access within the 40 day timescale as required by the Data Protection Act. We are proposing 1.0 wte Client Access to Records Editor specifically to work with Care Leavers.