

## **Appendix 1**

### **Summary of Consultation Questions and Responses**

The questions below were identified as key areas for consultation within the Stage One Best Value Report. Responses have come from the report of the Fostering Service Inspection undertaken in March 2004 (published September 2004) and a series of events and activities to engage young people in the looked after system in considering how the services they receive could be enhanced and improved. The Inspectors received questionnaire responses from social workers covering 94 children, 44 questionnaires from foster carers and 27 from children themselves. Family Placement Social Work staff and other stakeholders also had the opportunity to express their views and opinions.

1. To what extent are the policies and strategies for this area of service based on the present and future needs of stakeholders?

The Inspectors recognised that the standard of monitoring within the Fostering Service was over and above the requirements and to be commended. It ensured timely and appropriate information was available to improve the quality of foster care and positively influence policy and strategic development. Key messages coming direct from children included the importance of ensuring sufficient local placements to enable frequent contact with parents and siblings. Close working between the Adoption and Fostering elements of the service allows for the prediction of future permanent placement need.

2. How effective are we in managing, developing and releasing the potential of the people who provide the key resource for service delivery?

All in-house foster carers and adopters are provided with basic training and offered specialist training post approval. Some foster carers are now progressing to NVQ, which is seen as a good route for future development. There remains a need to ensure that all carers are trained up to the level of the best and also that experienced specialist staff are provided with the up to date specialist training that they require. Both Inspectors and foster carers recognised the great professional knowledge of staff, all of whom had also developed special areas of interest and expertise.

3. To what extent are we successful in planning and managing external partnerships and resources to ensure best outcomes for children?

Within the continuum of childcare resources provided or commissioned by Herefordshire Council, residential childcare is spot purchased from the private or voluntary sector in response to individual need. Increasingly these arrangements are managed across key agencies – specifically Health, Social Service and Education. There is now a strong local and national commitment to ensure that this approach applies to all looked after children. Some looked after children remain sceptical about

the results of partnership working and, quite reasonably, await personal evidence of improved outcomes. Steps are being taken to both reduce costs and improve outcomes by closer working with private sector providers.

4. Is our approach to organisation design, managing and improving processes achieving best value for stakeholders?

Comparison with both cost and outcome indicators for similar local authority areas indicates that the matrix of services to Herefordshire children achieves good value in all areas and best value in most. Best Value across the board is achievable within the improved internal and external partnerships referred to above. Services also need to be more closely aligned with the strategic analysis of future trends, and service user perceptions of what comprises good services and good outcomes.

5. Do stakeholders consider our results, including perception as well as actual performance, indicate the best attainable level of service?

Enquiries by the Inspectors indicated foster carers and other key stakeholders, including children, held broadly positive views about fostering services in the county. Local adopters have also been clear about their expectations of ongoing support and the steps required (in response to new legislation) to reach the best attainable levels of service. There remains a challenge in recruiting and commissioning sufficient experienced staff to address these issues. Whilst carers show an awareness of national standards and what constitutes a good service, children and young people are less able to articulate the general principles. There is a commitment to provide them with the information to better inform their judgements and engage in a productive dialogue on service improvement. There is an identifiable perception amongst carers and service users of improvements that have taken place over the last three years as a result of listening and responding to their views.

#### Note

A full list of 29 action points in relation to the requirements and recommendations of the Inspection of Herefordshire Fostering Service is appended to the Inspectors report. (CSCI, September 2004)