Sussex ODPM LAC Offending Initiative Research – Phase One Discussion Paper

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Discussion paper on first phase of ODPM-funded work with looked after children in Sussex

Introduction

This paper summarises the findings from the first stage of research and evaluation of the ODPM-funded work with looked after children and young people in Sussex to reduce offending, anti social behaviour and running away.

It details the results of an information-gathering exercise which was undertaken between October and December 2005 to facilitate the decision-making process of the Core Group in their plans to enhance current practice in the area.

The paper represents the views of those professionals who currently engage in direct work with looked after young people, with those who manage that work, those whose agencies have close association with this group of young people and with some of the young people themselves.

It also outlines wider debate about how to work productively with looked after young people.

The complexity of the issues involved has led to a detailed and lengthy paper. Those who might wish to glean the main messages without reading the whole paper are directed towards the Discussion (pp 20-28) and Conclusion sections (pp 29-32) which summarise the main points derived from this phase of the research. The Literature Review is also offered in concise form in a section immediately prior to the main Review (pp 33-35).

Structure of the paper

The paper is organised with the following structure

- Aims
- Methods
- Findings
- Discussion
- Conclusion
- Literature Review

The ‘Findings’ section incorporates analysis of current practices in the Sussex area. The ‘Discussion’ section offers some debate around the key issues in relation to the identified problems for the ODPM LAC Offending Initiative. The ‘Conclusion’ section summarises the debate and offers suggestions for potential short term and longer term responses.

Aims

The aims of this phase of the research, as laid out in the original proposal, were to

- Develop understanding of the current model of practice in one children’s home, theories of success, methods of intervention and plans for the work
• Develop a proposal for a detailed way of monitoring process and outcomes of practice

In fact, discussions after the drafting of the proposal indicated that it would be of further merit to look at current practice in two local authority children’s homes. This would offer broader reference points for the planning of the second phase of the work.

In addition, it became clear that another key development in practice should be included in the initial consideration of how to progress the work – a police-led initiative in the Worthing area whereby a Police Community Support Officer took on a dedicated role of supporting a number of private children’s homes to manage the behaviour of their young people in the community.

In relation to the second aim, this paper represents the starting point for the development of a proposal for monitoring subsequent developments within direct practice. The detail for this will come from discussion with the Core Group and be based on their decisions on how practice is taken forward in 2006.

**Methods**

During the three month period a number of telephone and face-to-face interviews were conducted.

All members of the Core Group were contacted and most offered their insights through semi-structured telephone interview.

Additional contacts were suggested through this process and these were followed-up with telephone discussions.

Visits were made to two local authority children's homes – one in East Sussex and the other in West Sussex. The researcher met with managers at both the homes, spoke to staff and young people and interviewed young people in one of the homes. Due to time constraints on the visits, some additional telephone interviewing was done afterwards (with staff members).

A review was undertaken of recent literature on interventions with looked after children in residential care who have problems with offending, anti-social behaviour or running away. This also incorporated internet searching for appropriate materials (so called ‘grey literature’ – i.e. unpublished material) and contacts with other organisations who had expertise in the area. As a result, a request for information on learning from practice was made through the National Children’s Bureau’s Children’s Residential Network.

**Findings**

**Interviews with the Core Group**

The interviews with Core Group members were used for a number of purposes. It was felt by the Research Team that it was important to gather a variety of views on the following issues:

- the origins of the ODPM initiative
- the local context for the initiative
- the aims of the initiative
- current local practice
- the contributions of different agencies
- what has been found to be effective
- ideas for how to progress the work
- aspirations for the evaluation
Some of the topics covered in the interviews were primarily intended to provide information to the researchers in contextualising the study – therefore, these are not reported on here.

To some degree, however, it became apparent through the interviews that the Group itself is still an evolving entity and that there is a need for information-sharing amongst its members. This section therefore will hopefully serve as a vehicle to enhance understanding by all of current practice (as described by interviewees) as well as detailing the main themes from the interviews which might offer insight and guidance in developing the work for the future.

**Aims of the ODPM initiative**

It seems appropriate to start by outlining the views expressed over the key objectives of the ODPM initiative. Not unsurprisingly there were competing perspectives from different agencies, but hearteningly there was an overall consensus on the underlying thrust of the work.

Respondents offered the following ideas as to the desired outcomes of the initiative:

- stability for young people looked after within the children’s homes
- improved safety for both young people and the wider community – reduction in the impact of offending and anti-social behaviour
- closer working relationships between professions – SSDs, YOT, police, children’s homes, education and Connexions
- a better understanding and more positive view by the local community of looked after children – their needs and circumstances
- a better understanding by professionals of the experience of being looked after in residential care
- a reduction in the workloads of statutory agencies – police and SSDs in particular – in the management of crises

At the core of all these ideas was the desire, as one interviewee summarised, to find out:

> *What are the means of helping young people to contain their distress in a more socially acceptable way and what responsibilities do services have in helping achieve that goal.*

and, more fundamentally,

> *Actually we’re seeking ways for those young people to have a better outcome for themselves at the end of the day … not to be involved in the criminal justice system – or even if we delay involvement, rather than stopping it, that would be good – but also ensuring their educational outcomes are better, that they are linked into good support networks for education and social welfare – and that those educational opportunities are as good as they could be.*

> *You know, that wherever they come from, whether they’re our West Sussex young people or from London or whatever, that actually they have the chance to develop their social networks and feel connected to their situation rather than feeling disjointed.*

**The ‘problem’**

A view that was voiced by almost all those we spoke to was that the ‘problem’ that was cited as the catalyst for the ODPM initiative was somewhat nebulous in nature.

The consensus was that it was extremely difficult to quantify the amount of offending or ASB by looked after young people – and that perhaps the fundamental issue was one of perception. Interviewees suggested that a number of factors had converged to generate this perception:

- an increasing awareness and concern within the local community (in Worthing) of a “high concentration” of children’s homes in the town centre area, fuelled by local and national media attention;
The involvement of local politicians – and the escalation to involvement of an MP and of a Government minister (Lord Filkin);

a feeling that this concern was exacerbated by the demographic characteristics of the indigenous population – dominated by elderly people, who may be inclined to feel under threat from ‘youth’;

a suggestion that looked after children are “easily labelled” or “targeted” – and that young people can project an image that feeds into this labelling;

ignorance about the needs and circumstances of vulnerable young people;

concerns about the quality of care afforded to young people placed in residential care – particularly those who are moved out-of-authority and placed in independent sector homes (concerns centred on care within the homes themselves and also on the level of ongoing support offered by the placing authority);

The main evidence that was offered in support of community concerns centred around burgeoning missing persons reports from the homes. This had led to heightened police involvement with the private homes and to a feeling that there was a need to address the issue of reporting procedures within the homes. (We shall return to this later).

The need to develop a fuller understanding of the issues

There was a broad consensus across the Core Group that there is a need to better understand the current situation with regard to the level and nature of offending, asb and running away across the residential child care sector in the county.

It was agreed that there is a high level of risk that young people in the sector will become involved in the criminal justice system – and that this would necessarily have an impact not just on the communities local to each home, but also on the subsequent life chances of the young people themselves.

However, there was no agreement on the actual levels of offending, asb or running away. Some respondents felt that levels were high, with looked after children being responsible for a disproportionate amount of police time due to behaviour bordering on criminal and/or actually offending – and due to practices around going missing.

West Sussex has suffered a disproportionate number of looked after children in the area and the perception was that these young people were responsible for a large amount of crime and anti-social behaviour.

To others, the problem was that looked after children are pinpointed as perpetrators, drawn into the system due to the attitudes and practices of children’s home staff and often not actually responsible for more crime or asb than their peers in the community.

There has been a lot of anti-social behaviour by some young people but, in a way, ours are easier to target and for them (the community) to say, ‘It’s all coming from them!’ whether it is or not.

Clearly then, there was consensus that more informative data should be collected to offer reliable insight into the true situation, but allied to this was a general view that data should also be recorded that could facilitate a better understanding of the factors which might influence looked after young people involvement in crime, asb and running away.

This led to a discussion in the interview of what each respondent’s ‘theories’ were around what might be effective in reducing young people’s involvement and their knowledge of what had been already done or tried locally in response to this need. This information is outlined in the next section.
Current local practice responses

A number of practice responses were described during the course of the interviews. We have grouped them under two headings here – ‘Approaches to behaviour management within homes’ and ‘Facilitating understanding and broader relationships within the professional community’ – but it is important to note that many of the items really extend beyond these headings.

Approaches to behaviour management within homes

- Use of restorative justice principles on an informal basis
  Sussex Police provided a training opportunity for independent sector managers on restorative justice (rj) techniques. Although there was a relatively low take up there was a feeling amongst many interviewees that the rj is being used within many homes, but in an informal way (and sometimes referred to by another name).

- ‘Reactive planning’
  One home in the independent sector had built a culture whereby the focus was on cultivating relationships with the young people, reducing rules within the home;

  We’ve worked really hard with getting to know the children really well. We don’t believe in having lots of rules – we have our set rules which are for health and safety and we have expectations of the children which are that they treat people with respect and that they are responsible for themselves and the actions that they take – and we work within that. The boundaries are set. It works very well.

Within this approach staff deal with incidents in two ways – firstly, in the immediate term by diffusing the situation, but then later by confronting the young person with the potential consequences and discussing things in a calmer and more rational way. The learning from each incident was subsequently integrated into ongoing planning for work with the young person. The interviewee who described this approach referred to it as ‘Reactive Planning’.

- Role of advocacy
  Independent advocacy has been used in local authority residential homes in West Sussex for some time and it was suggested that good advocacy could contribute to increased stability and better outcomes for young people;

  Advocacy can be successful in bringing about some stability and reduce the numbers of moves and changes in young people’s lives if young people are better listened to. A dedicated advocacy service will have an impact in providing more stability and thereby reduce offending behaviour.

Facilitating understanding and relationships within the professional community

A range of factors had contributed to this:

- the work of the Core Group for the ODPM initiative, which:
  is across local authority boundaries
  is interagency
  facilitates understanding about roles, responsibilities and perspectives
  facilitates understanding and knowledge about looked after children

- an independent sector children’s homes forum
  a forum for exchange of experiences and challenges in work within the homes. (This may offer further potential in a number of ways – sharing challenges for peer support, the opportunity to
share good practice, and the chance to build understanding of the behaviour of young people across these units).

- the Community Policing, CSCI and managers of homes conference
  this took place in May 2004 and was organised to look at how providers of children’s homes and police could work more effectively together to reduce crime and the ways in which looked after children were impacting on criminal statistics.

- the PCSO liaison role
  (described in detail in a section below).

**Additional work that could be developed**

A number of suggestions were made during the Core Group interviews as ideas about what additional inputs might work in enhancing the overall success of the ODPM initiative:

- focus on training, selection and development of staff within homes
- ensure that placing authorities make appropriate placements and provide ongoing support
- identify what is effective in a residential care context in promoting stability for young people
- take fuller account of the young people’s views on their lives and what helps them through further promotion of advocacy and participation work
- develop a peer support model involving young people who have had experience of the criminal justice system
- increase opportunities for young people to become involved in education, training and extra-curricular activities – diversionary activities
- establish good practice in reporting
- increase the role of RJ, especially in its more formal, conferencing approach to young people who have committed offences or been involved in asb

**Concluding comments**

The interviews with the Core Group and other key professionals provided a rich source of data to inform the thinking for this Discussion Paper.

It became clear through analysis of the information provided that the problems which the initiative sought to address were extremely complex and would require a corresponding degree of sophistication in building solutions.

In the next section of the paper we go on to consider the complementary data that was collected through visits to two local authority children’s homes. These visits were undertaken to establish a better understanding of the two different approaches to addressing difficult behaviour which were being employed in the units.
Visit to Lansdowne House, Hailsham

The Restorative Justice approach

This section is based around interviews with the manager and deputy manager at Lansdowne House and with two young people who live at the home. The interviews were conducted during a visit to the home during December.

It was intended to canvass the views of staff and although this was achieved to a degree through informal discussion during the visit it was not possible to undertake telephone follow-up interviews as was originally planned.

Despite this gap in the data it was felt that sufficient information was garnered to offer a useful insight into this practice approach in this setting. The data collected directly during the visit was augmented with the use of secondary sources including literature and statistical data provided by the managers at the home.

Introduction

Restorative justice comprises a number of different approaches but a broad definition offered to the researcher was:

*Restorative justice is a problem-solving approach which involves the parties themselves and the community generally in an active relationship with statutory agencies … it is a process whereby parties with a stake in a specific offence resolve collectively how to deal with the aftermath of the offence and its implications for the future.*

[Marshall, 1999]

To summarise the approach as used in a residential care setting – and possibly to do it a disservice in terms of authentic representation – there is an emphasis on overall integrity and holism. The onus is on the interdependence of a number of underlying principles which in conjunction lead to individual and group safety – and social harmony.

To illustrate this, for example, a member of the community (most often the community within the home in this instance) who has suffered harm or loss will be afforded the following assurances in the RJ process:

- their needs will be a central focus
- their personal experiences will be respected
- their harm or loss will be fully acknowledged
- the need to make amends will be recognised
- they will have the opportunity to communicate directly with the person who caused harm
- they will be the primary beneficiary of reparation

Similarly, the individual who has caused the harm or loss will be offered:

- an opportunity to recognise the harm caused due to their choices or actions
- a chance to make appropriate reparation – proportionate to the harm done and to their capacity to fulfil the undertaking
- respect for their dignity throughout the process

The process of RJ is predicated on informed consent – i.e. voluntary participation with full knowledge of the implications of involvement.

These points emphasise the more formal elements of RJ – which can have a formalised outcome in terms of conferencing for more serious incidents – but the system can only really be successful if the
core principles are understood, accepted and utilised consistently over time by all members of a community in an ongoing, informal way.

In a setting such as a children’s home this essentially means the staff team operating in an appropriate manner and gradually cultivating understanding and reciprocal, respectful behaviour amongst the young people living in the home (although of course in addition there will be a ‘peer mentoring’ effect amongst the young people themselves and often this will be the most invaluable means of reinforcing the system since the young people are omnipresent).

The experience of RJ from the Lansdowne House perspective

RJ had been used more formally to deal with a range of different offences at the home – from damage to property, minor assaults, bullying, theft, verbal threats and insults to altercations with neighbours – at the more serious end of the spectrum it had also been employed to deal with an allegation of rape by one young person against another.

Positive outcomes of the RJ model

Evidence was offered as to the overall effectiveness of the approach:

- during the 12-month period prior to September 2004 (when the approach was introduced) seven out of nine young people in Lansdowne had been before the courts or had received a final warning – but during the following 12-month period only one child had been before the court for offences outside the home
- in the same period sanctions were reduced by 70% and physical control measures were also drastically reduced
- “Restorative Justice has been used to good effect and reduced police involvement in the home” [Lansdowne House CSCI Inspection Report, 2005].

It would be fair to say that the managers and staff were wholehearted in their enthusiasm for the RJ model that they used.

Managers and staff made a number of points in relation to the positive elements of the model.

For both the young people and the staff it was felt that there was short term benefit in a controlled response to difficult incidents:

Staff here treat more minor incidents with a more measured response, shying away from punitive sanctioning which ultimately often proves to be more laborious, long term and inappropriate because it does not address the issue meaningfully and in a timely way.

The use of a more restrained approach helped avoid the escalation of less serious incidents:

Before, staff would tend to contact police as a ‘gut response’ to quite minor incidents of criminal damage. But this leads to a ‘Keystone Cops’ situation – the kids would get off on the buzz of the police getting involved and often the situation would get worse … and over time they might actually feel encouraged to offend again to provoke the same response.

The incremental effect of moving away from this ‘gut response’ was that in-house incidents, particularly of criminal damage, had fallen significantly. An additional longer term positive outcome for the young people was identified:

A positive spin-off of using the approach with these young people is that they themselves benefit more widely in learning the process which they can then use for themselves in improving their lives.
There was also a material benefit for the home:

_In addition over time they learn to contribute positively to the community. A good example is a couple of the boys here who used to do large amounts of criminal damage – probably up to £10,000-worth when it was bad – but now they are actually putting value back by helping to decorate._

And, as a result of all this, over time:

_The staff team at Lansdowne feel empowered by RJ – and the young people feel ‘boundaried’, allowing staff to deal with more difficult issues._

This had a notable effect on staff morale:

_You know it’s going to work – because it’s a voluntary process. You need to know that the offender is sorry, has the capacity for remorse and so on, but if this is the case you can be confident. And we know that because we’ve done it successfully many times now._

And, possibly most inspiringly, in the case of the (false) rape allegation that was dealt with through RJ conferencing it was felt that the approach offered a significant turning point for the young man involved.

_With staff support he had to think really seriously about how it could have impacted on his life long term – which caused him to reflect and review everything and to decide to engage again, with education and lots of other important aspects of his life … and to have meaningful targets for himself – It was a surprise to him as much as it was to the staff!_

**Difficulties in the implementation of RJ**

These positive views were balanced with some more pragmatic reflections on the implementation of the approach.

It was pointed out that young people required skilled and careful preparation if they were to take part in a full-blown RJ conference.

_There can be a thin dividing line between recreating trauma and doing useful RJ. The participants in a conference have to re-engage with their feelings at the time of the incident and this can be difficult for them and damaging if they are not fully prepared._

It had also been difficult for some of the staff team to come to terms with the approach. A number had not been able to reconcile their feeling that the method was “too soft” – that there was a lack of punitive sanctioning. In the early days of implementation these staff members had left the team – which had necessitated fresh recruitment (although it was felt that ultimately the team was stronger and more diverse as a result).

Most of the points made above in relation to the positives of the model relate to its application for in-house incidents – but when forced to deal with incidents outside the home the situation became more complex.

The managers at Lansdowne felt that the use of RJ had brought them into something of a ‘grey area’ in terms of their professional responsibilities in relation to offending outside the home.

They gave the example of a shoplifting incident in a local chemist – which, in theory, they should have reported immediately once they were party to the offence, but which in practice due to the principles of the approach, they did not because they placed the onus on the young people involved to take responsibility.
The outcome was that the ‘perpetrators’ chose to own up and staff facilitated a visit to the manager of the shop – who listened to their apology, accepted it, explained his position and the possible serious outcome of their actions, and banned them from his store – but without the incursion of any criminal proceedings.

However, despite the benign outcome, this example did serve to illustrate the potential for staff to be compromised (in a legal sense) by employing the approach should other parties perhaps not react so well.

This need for others to respond appropriately to young people when they and staff are attempting to operate within the principles of RJ was further highlighted with respect to the issue of education. It was stated that:

> There is a huge variation in the way schools currently respond to the young people and in their understanding of RJ … although I think there is a plan by the Education Department to roll-out the use of RJ across all schools in East Sussex – which would be great and would make our job much easier.

Even more crucially it was underlined that all local police officers needed to be tuned-in to the way the home was trying to work – something that had proved to be a problem on some occasions when they had had to be contacted for more serious incidents.

> One issue which can be a downfall of the current situation is that although there is an agreed protocol with the local police, and higher management are informed and aware, things haven’t filtered-down consistently. Not every beat officer is clued-in to the agreed way of working.

An example was offered of how this had caused complications was offered. A young person in the home had sustained a blow to the in a fracas with another young person. Staff dealt with the situation and a visit to hospital confirmed that the young person was ok.

The young person had no desire to pursue an assault charge against his assailant but staff thought it would be wise to log the incident with the police purely as a contingency against any future complications. This proved to be difficult because the police seemed unable or unwilling to accommodate a simple recording of the matter without pursuing further lines of inquiry – including visits to interview everyone, etc. It seemed that police procedure had to take precedence over the needs and wishes of the young person and the staff team. The ability of the staff to manage the situation sensitively and sympathetically was compromised.

It was also conceded by the managers that there had continued to be some difficulties with asb in the local community which they had come to feel was beyond their control. The example given was of young people “bullying” – or attempting to bully – a young woman to buy them cigarettes from a shop. The family of the woman had complained to the home but they had not been willing to enter into an RJ process so the matter went unresolved.

**Young people’s views**

The two young people who were interviewed reported positive experiences of living in the home. Both had lived at Lansdowne prior to and then during the implementation of the RJ model and both reflected on how things had changed for the better:

> Everyone – since I’ve been here – has improved a hell of a lot. I’m not just saying that – I’ve seen people as they’ve been improving.
> We work together like a family in this place. If one person’s kicking off we help them. Or, if two people are kicking off we help them … it’s like all of us, we help each other, the kids and the staff – we help each other to resolve problems.

They both talked about how they had come to trust the staff in using RJ methods
I know now that staff don’t get straight on to the police – they do try and calm the situation down and try and take off people, have a little one-to-one and stuff like that. But (only) if it escalates and gets really, really bad and someone feels that are they are in danger or everybody else is in danger then that’s, like, the last resort, to get the police in.

and one spoke at length about his involvement in the conferencing process. The incident has occurred when he was being restrained in a bid to prevent him assaulting another young person. He had turned his anger on the member of staff and hit him:

At the time I was angry … it was like boiling-up inside ‘cos it was stress – at the time being in here was doing my head in … it felt like a prison.

The young person explained how – having returned to the home after a night in the cells following his arrest – he had been helped to think things through and then supported in the conference. He had made apologies to the staff member and done some reparation work to the home.

He reported that he had felt respected during the process, that staff really heard what he told them:

Yeah – it don’t go in one ear and out the other – it stays in their head, which is good!

and said of the conference itself:

It was alright – it was the best meeting I’ve had, actually! Not like my normal LAC reviews … it was just like a real small meeting with a few people. It was alright, I quite liked it.

Interestingly, both young people had come to the home with experience of the criminal justice system – both had had Referral Orders and Final Warnings and said that they had been in loads of trouble in the past. However, they felt that their experiences at Lansdowne had afforded them the chance to make conscious decisions to turn things around.

One said that he had stopped going to meet up with mates in Hastings – because when he went he always ended up involving himself in offending. He had consciously broken his links there and not been for over a year. Now he focussed on helping out at the home and on contacts with his extended family:

I like it here now – I’ve sort of got a bond with staff now … they help me to do things I didn’t think I’d be able to do like cook and paint and things like that. They treat me very well.

The other young person felt he had found a place where he could feel calm and settled:

When I first came if I got into an argument with anybody I probably would’ve lashed out – this happened a few times … but now I’ve learnt there’s better ways to deal with things.

And the plan that he had for a future career indicated how positively he viewed his experiences at the home!

I’ve been speaking to (deputy manager) ‘cos I was hoping to do this kind of work – in child care and stuff … I’ve been through most things, so I could maybe help them out in different ways – I’d just have more of an understanding about it … he said if I want to do this there’s going to be, like, a trainee placement here and I was hoping I could, like, get into that.

Possibly most interestingly of all, one of the young people was able to make a comparison between the Lansdowne unit and its ‘sister’ home in Hastings (where RJ has not been fully implemented). He said that the regimes were very different:

The staff are more laid back over there – but I don’t like it ‘cos staff are always out of order over there. They give the kids cigarettes and money – more money than we get … and it’s more violent over there as well.

I didn’t think it was the right place for me – I like a bit of discipline every now and then.
Clearly this young person did not regard RJ as a ‘soft option’ as he explained further during the interview – he welcomed the boundaries and the clarity of purpose that he felt came with RJ.

**Summary**

When one reviews the evidence offered over the use of the RJ approach in this home it would seem to offer a number of positives to young people and staff.

The managers were pragmatic enough to concede that this was no ‘magic wand’;

> *We still have some damage – but on an acceptable level, not the carnage of before!*

but were emphatic in their recommendation of the approach.

To reflect a little more, the beneficial effects most clearly relate to the situation within the home. It is one proposition to foster an in-house culture for dealing with offending and asb incidents – and thereby to lessen contacts with the criminal justice system as a result of incidents that occur within the walls of an establishment.

But complications do arise when the young people perpetrate offences outside the home – at that point the far more difficult process of negotiating with other adults ensues. Often these will be other professionals such as the police and teachers who may have some understanding and sympathy towards the approach (although this may not always be the case, as indicated above), but sometimes it will be neighbours to the home or retail staff in local shops who are less likely to respond in kind to attempts to work with RJ methods.

However, the figures on court appearances do offer some grounds for hope that the model does have a wider effect on the young people in the decisions they make about their actions in the wider community.

It is also worth mentioning that the managers were keen to point out that, in their opinion, the successful implementation of the approach was dependant on a number of contextual factors – in terms of management of a home, the staff team and the type of young people who were resident. We will return to this issue below in the ‘Conclusory comments section’.

**Visit to Seaside Children’s Home, Shoreham**

**The Trust Level System**

For this paper we looked at the use of the TLS in one home in West Sussex – Seaside in Shoreham.

This section is based around interviews with the acting manager and a member of staff – it was not possible to undertake interviews with the young people during the visit and subsequent arrangements for telephone interviews fell through. The interview data was supplemented by documentation provided by the home.

**Introduction**

The Trust Level System (TLS) is a reward scheme which offers financial and other material ‘status’ rewards in tiered, hierarchical bands to encourage and acknowledge advances in good behaviour by young people living in a children’s home.

The system has two aspects – meeting the goals of group living and meeting the individual targets in a personal care plan.
The former may include goals such as not swearing, respecting property, asking and not demanding, listening to others and so on – the latter will be tailored to suit each individual.

Young people are set three specific targets per week and their performance in relation to each one logged daily (with a tick on a sheet). At the end of the week the total of ticks is calculated and, if there are sufficient ticks, a pecuniary reward is paid.

This money is to be spent on ‘wholesome’ things – i.e. not alcohol or tobacco – and can amount to as much as an additional £25 per week on top of regular pocket money.

There are four different levels in the system – Admission, Bronze, Silver and Gold. Each incorporates increasing levels of expectation and extra privileges on top of the additional financial reward – for example the Admission level is for the first 14 days of the placement and is about basic issues, such as keeping to agreed times, etc, whereas at Silver level the young people will be entitled to a TV and VCR in their own room (with guidelines for times for use), plus the provision of a personal mobile phone.

Overall, then, there is a significant material advantage to be gained through engagement with the system.

Young people are promoted through the levels by agreement with their keyworker who will review their performance with them at regular keywork sessions, and, as appropriate, propose this to the whole staff team for their approval. Similarly, demotion (which is regarded as a serious issue) would be discussed by the whole staff team before being considered as a possible course of action.

The system was implemented across all West Sussex children’s homes (not sure of date) but has been subsequently been removed from the regime at one other home, in Crawley, where it could not be successfully operated due to the shorter term nature of placements.

The TLS is based on a core principle of “Respect for self and for others” and “The belief that trust should be earned and once earned, respected”.

It is informed by the idea that it is appropriate to let young people know in “a concrete way … how well they are behaving within the home and the ‘status’ they have achieved.”

And the clear underlying rationale is that the incremental effect of good behaviours will lead to harmony in the home and the creation of a self-maintaining and self-interested culture will perpetuate this to the mutual benefit of both young people and staff – the clearest manifestation of this being that at the ‘Gold’ level young people are expected to “show initiative” and “make a real contribution to the smooth running of the unit”.

**The experience of using the TLS at Seaside Children’s Home in Shoreham**

The staff members whom we spoke to were keen to advocate the merits of the TLS.

The acting manager, who had broad experience of a number of residential homes across the county, claimed that at Seaside,

> It’s not very often it gets abused and most kids will buy into it – and it does work!

and the staff member echoed this:

> I’ve been here for about two years and all the young people who’ve lived here during that time – except the boy we talked about earlier who only stayed for a couple of months – all the others pretty much it’s worked from the start. They do go up and down and things happen, but I’ve not seen a child where it’s not eventually worked.

He continued:
It's a really useful tool to us, because the various targets that we set can be based around their behaviour – if they're aggressive to staff, or they're rude, or they have a tendency to break things or punch walls, the way they deal with it when they're told, 'No!', by staff, that can be included in their targets ... and it does work from where I see it.

Both these interviewees talked more widely about the ways of working in the home. The TLS was regarded as a mechanism for control which had proved to be effective for most of the young people over time.

A different element in working effectively in managing the young people's behaviour was the invaluable input from a worker from the CAMHS team. This specialist psychologist was able to help the team focus on the ways they operated with each young person – to ensure that they used the best approaches to dealing with individual need.

These methods of behaviour control were backed up by other aspects of the operation of the home, aimed at further contributing to both the reduction in the young people's involvement in the criminal justice system and at improving their understanding of it.

To address the first of these aims, the home had considered its thresholds for police reporting for incidents within the home – and had taken on some of the ideas around reparation within RJ:

That's our way of working RJ – that we won't go phoning the police every five minutes for criminal damage. We'll look for other ways, like them (the young people) paying some of it back or working towards repairing it. That's the line we've got here.

The acting manager reiterated this message:

The use of the police is very, very last resort – we do prefer to deal with it on our own. Only if problems in the house escalate and staff feel what they have tried really isn't working.

It's like the old adage I say to people – 'If your son smashes a window frame in your house, what're you gonna do? You're not gonna phone the police straight away, are you? Well it's the same here – it's their house, it's their home. You'd be saying to your son, "Well, you broke it, so you're gonna pay for it!".'

He said that thresholds for reporting to the police were not explicitly agreed but that staff had discretion and that consensus was generated through discussions in team meetings and through supervision.

This philosophy had clearly rubbed-off on the staff as the team member who was interviewed reported that on the only occasion when he had been the victim of an assault he had elected not to report it to the police:

I chose not to because of the situation and I didn’t want to get this girl into any more trouble than she was already in.

An additional element in trying to improve young people’s view and understanding of the criminal justice system was the cultivation of a relationship with a local officer. This had been done consciously over a period of time to try to remove some of the stereotypes that the young people had:

Everybody has this feeling about police officers – they're 'the Law' or whatever. So it was just to kind of break the barrier … it's a person – who's trying to uphold the law. I think that we've worked that across the units.

And this had become more formalised recently with the introduction of a PCSO with responsibility for liaison with the home (although it was not clear whether this was the same officer who worked with the private homes in Worthing):

Now we have a local Police Community Officer who pops in regularly to see how things are. She's also been in to talk to the young people about a variety of things like opportunities for them locally.
The manager commented on the merits of this – the PCSO had proved to be a good contact point for the staff, had formed positive relationships with the young people and had advocated for them in external settings when others had attempted to impugn them due to their care status.

He also mused that there were merits in the ‘ripple effect’ of more positive messages about the home being fed back to the local police by the PCSO:

> Lots of police officers do come here and think its naughty boys and naughty girls – and you can say, ‘Well, no, actually nothing could be further from the truth, really’. I find that quite interesting in this day and age – that there’s police officers that think in those terms – and quite a lot of them do. In the past I’ve had police officers asking, ‘Why don’t you lock them in at night?’.

In terms of procedures for young people who went missing, he said that the local authority had introduced a protocol and that the police are doing return home interviews. There are two levels in the protocol for reporting – a young person who is ‘absent’ (and adjudged by staff to be relatively safe via a risk assessment process) will not be searched for by the police; a young person who is missing (i.e. not known to be safe) will be actively sought by the police. And, he reported that to his surprise,

> The young people are cooperating with the return home interviews!

The final element in trying to bolster positive practice with the young people was the input of the Participation Advocacy and Rights Project (PAR). This project offered young people individual support with advocating for their rights (to education places, fair treatment in the home, etc) and to having their views taken into full consideration in decisions around their care - in review meetings, for example. It also offered the opportunity to actively participate in the production of a magazine for all those looked after in the area and to work on groups developing policy initiatives – an opportunity which the young people currently living in the home had keenly embraced.

**Summary**

From a staff and management perspective the TLS had proved to be an effective measure in contributing to the successful management of difficult behaviours within the home.

However, it was embedded in a wider set of practices all feeding in to the goal of helping the young people to operate responsibly, respectfully and sociably within the home and with the hope of a resulting broader positive effect in their dealings with the wider world.

**Concluding comments on local authority home in-house approaches**

In terms of these two models there seemed to be consensus (at least amongst the limited groups we talked to) that what was done in each home was effective and that staff were relatively happy with the way in which they were operating.

The statistical ‘evidence’ we acquired during this phase of the study was somewhat piecemeal and not able to fully support claims around effectiveness – but for the RJ approach did offer some additional reassurance.

We should offer the caveat here, therefore, that this is not comprehensive research or evaluation, but an initial attempt to understand the situation.

However, two issues are of particular note in that they form central theories about the likely effectiveness of practice interventions in any setting and echo our findings from evaluations of different areas of practice:

- the importance of staff consensus in embracing a way of working
the need for full consideration to the practice context in introducing an intervention

Our examination of these models highlighted the fundamental need for both these things to be right for successful practice.

At Lansdowne House, the managers particularly underlined the need for staff to be willing and enthusiastic RJ practitioners:

_The staff team have to own the approach – it's absolutely vital that the whole team buy-in. You can perhaps carry a couple of 'doubters', at least initially, because you know they will become convinced about RJ once they use it for a while. But without consistency the approach would soon be undermined in this setting._

And they offered evidence of this not being the case. They said that at their ‘sister’ unit, in Hastings, staff had been trained in RJ but had not taken it on-board in the same way:

_There can be a degree of scepticism around this since on the surface it is not a punitive model – some see it as too much of a 'soft option'. Our colleagues at Hastings haven’t properly implemented RJ and haven’t seen the results we’ve had here._

(Interestingly this was supported by a young person who we interviewed who had lived at the Hastings home and did not like the atmosphere there – which he viewed as less structured and more violent).

And at Seaside both interviewees were in accord as to the effectiveness of the TLS:

_I would say it works here and it works for specific children – if young people will engage with it and are interested, then it works._

This comment feeds into the second point – the importance of context.

The manager at Seaside stressed that the approach could only be successful with the right type of young person – as in, a young person, who was in a certain situation. He explained this as follows:

_If they’re not really interested then it’s a disaster … it just doesn’t suit them at all. They won’t engage with it and we have difficulties with them … We tried the System at Crawley. Management in West Sussex wanted the system to be introduced across all the units, but it doesn’t actually work – it won’t work in every unit. If you’re dealing with children who are transitional they’re not interested. They’ve got so many other things going round in their heads at the time they’re not going to buy-into it. It’s a different way of working there – it’s more about engaging with the kids, more the start of a process … by the time they get to Seaside they’ve been through that, come out the other side, decided for themselves they need to get back into life, in a sense – or they have some order in their life already – and they can slot into the System quite nicely._

This idea that young people require stability of placement – the knowledge that they are likely to remain in a setting for some time and build a life there – before they can successfully engage with this type of intervention, was mirrored in the comments made at Lansdowne House.

_Our intake is nearly always young people for whom there is no likelihood of a return home and where fostering is not appropriate … for most young people who are admitted to the home there is an expectation on their part that they will be treated with punitive sanctions. It takes them some time to come to terms with the RJ environment and to readjust their own responses, but this settling-in period is what we expect and we know things will improve._

Two supporting points should also be made here – both were also raised in reflections on how the homes were able to operate their distinct systems successfully.

The first is that there had to be core consistency in terms of staffing. At Lansdowne House there was always a fully-trained (in RJ), staff member on shift and relief staff have some experience of the way of
working since they have all done a number of shifts under the new regime. At Seaside, similarly, on most shifts there is a permanent member of staff and all relief staff have worked extensively with the unit and understand the TLS.

The second point is that both systems sit within wider sets of mechanisms designed to enhance the creation of harmony in the homes. Whilst RJ is more holistic in its claims, managers at Lansdowne indicated the importance of the contribution of other inputs, including the work of a dedicated CAMHS specialist and the value of well-developed reporting protocols with local police. Similarly at Seaside there was reference made to inputs from CAMHS, the police, a children’s rights and advocacy project and an informal adoption of some RJ reparation principles.

There may be an impression given – by juxtaposing these two models here – that we are comparing like-with-like. It is important to stress that this is not the case, that RJ offers a much broader theory and practice methodology whereas TLS offers a relatively pragmatic rewards-based approach to behaviour control – but at core there seem to be similar requirements for what are both claimed to be successful systems.

The final element of current practice, which deserved a singular focus in the First Phase of the research, was the piloting by Sussex Police of a new post – a PCSO with a special role in working with private children’s homes in the Worthing area.

**The Police Community Support Officer liaison role**

This section is based on an interview with the police officer undertaking the work and on the comments made by Core Group members.

The PCSO liaison role has been in operation for around nine months and was instigated and funded by the police as a response to the original concerns about offending and asb by looked after young people in Worthing.

The work relates solely to the private children’s homes in the area. It is a pilot approach which will be reviewed as part of the ongoing work under the ODPM initiative.

**The perspective of the PCSO undertaking the liaison role**

The key focus of the work has been to be a bridge between the independent children’s homes and the police – to act as a communication agent (two-way) between often uncommunicative agencies and to facilitate partnership working:

… To break down the ‘them and us’ scenario that there has been for quite a while

This has worked very well:

*We now know who is in the homes, where they have come from, the problems that we have and what their behaviour is like.*

The role has evolved – from an initial drive to build relationships with the homes (managers, staff and young people) with a focus on reducing the amount of missing episodes – through developing work on other issues within the homes – reducing criminal damage, assault, bullying, and other asb incidents.

Much of the role has entailed one-to-one work with the young people and the PCSO felt she had been able to cultivate positive relationships with “99%” of those she has worked with. Within this aspect of the role, an individualised action plan will be put in place for new children when they are admitted. This can
be between a number of parties according to the circumstances, but usually the young person, the police, the social worker and the home manager. In some cases, where this informal approach has not proved to be effective, an Agreed Behaviour Contract has been negotiated with stricter constraints on specific behaviours.

With other local professionals, the PCSO has formed a local action team. Representatives from CAMHS, the health service, and education meet quarterly to share information on their respective roles and the work of their agencies in relation to looked after young people. This is also a forum to discuss concerns over particular young people in the homes from multi-agency perspectives (with permission from the home concerned).

Additional benefits that had come from the work were that:

- staff had become sufficiently trusting to use the PCSO as a “sounding board” for advice on a variety of issues they had to address (e.g. people who hang around the home, discovery of items/substances in the home, problems with neighbours);
- on occasion the PCSO had negotiated in neighbourhood disputes;
- the police had acquired intelligence in relation to adults who were inappropriately contacting the young people in the homes.

The PCSO expressed a number of theories which she had developed during her time in the role:

- it is extremely difficult to gauge levels of asb / offending as they fluctuate constantly and drastically with the movement of children into and out of the homes. At the time of interview it was relatively high due to the presence of a number of prolific offenders – but these individuals were in transition to secure accommodation or alternative placements. Sometimes there is no crime at all.

  *When new children move in it instantly puts the crime up again and we look at that and put some plans in place.*

- education is a key issue – some homes offer in-house provision but others do not. Access to some form of education is important in reducing asb/offending.

- the action plan approach works well on the whole, but not with all young people:

  …* for some of the young people it’s not so successful due to the life they have had and the way they have grown up.*

  If young people come with a chaotic background and have been habitual offenders then they are less likely to respond. For these young people the PCSO was looking at introducing more work on consequences of criminal behaviour and targeted deterents into the work (such as trips to YOIs) – a “sharp, shock visit”.

The PCSO was also trying to gradually encourage the adoption of RJ approaches within the homes – to empower them to deal with some issues themselves without any need to involve the police.

The PCSO was very happy with what she had achieved in the work – she was enjoying the role and felt that it was a valuable contribution to policing in the area.

*The verdict on the PCSO initiative from others*

The positive view conveyed by the officer herself was corroborated by a number of other professionals we spoke to and her efforts were lauded by all parties.

From a police perspective the role had “opened up the doors” and removed many of the previous barriers to successful partnership work. The benefit of young people (and staff) of having a non-
threatening police presence which also offered an opportunity to understand how the police enforce the law, combined with the establishment of better lines of communication, had had a clear positive overall effect.

However, it was felt that having a police officer at the centre of close working with young people was not entirely appropriate. It was suggested that perhaps a police officer might have too many vested interests and limited option for discretion due to their professional duties – and that perhaps a different approach might be needed to enhance decision-making about individual young people:

It should be an independent role – but in terms of making it a police role in the short-term it has been very successful … What I think is more appropriate is that you have someone in there who can hold that confidentiality and look at the interests of the child, the interests of the community and work in liaison with the police.

Their role should be above and beyond that (the PCSO) role … linking in the same way as I think social services and the YOT should be linking, enabling that person to have an overview and take whatever is the most appropriate route to overcome any problems.

The independent homes reported how well the PCSO had worked.

She is brilliant … if we have a problem we can ring (PCSO) up and talk to her. She also came and helped us. One of the incidents that the police came to was connected to the neighbours and she actually supported us through that process and it worked extremely well.

She’ll always come in and speak to the children if we ask her or speak to the staff if there are particular areas that we need to talk through.

In addition, it was stated that the PCSO liaison role had been an excellent link for local Social Care Commission inspectors and that it had been an effective approach in reducing crime:

I think it works because she has spent a lot of time getting to know the children, the managers of the services and the staff who work in the homes, so she has become a know and named person in authority that they link-in to … (because) she goes to the children’s homes quite regularly, it has made it ‘normal’ rather than the police just coming when it is negative.

Overall, the work undertaken in the piloting of the PCSO liaison role has provided an invaluable additional input into the local response to offending, asb and going missing for young people looked after by the private homes in Worthing. The learning from this will, likewise, be useful in taking forward further initiatives to address the problems elsewhere in the county.
Discussion

The ODPM initiative originates in concerns about community safety in the face of the ‘threat’ of looked after children and young people and their perceived propensity to offend, perpetrate acts of anti-social behaviour and go missing from care.

The initial primary issue was identified in relation to a group of private homes in an area of Worthing – but over time this served as the catalyst in prompting a wider debate about how to improve the life chances of those looked after in residential care across the Sussex area.

It is worth reiterating this basic description of the evolution of the initiative because it highlights a number of different facets of this ‘problem’ – or perhaps more accurately ‘problems’. The degree of complexity in the situation which the initiative seeks to address necessitates an eclectic response – and to some extent may require a leap of faith, since it is not yet clear what may be most effective in meeting the myriad needs which may present themselves over time:

… the extent of empirical research on residential care is still very limited and we have barely begun to scratch the surface of some highly complex problems.

[Berridge, 2002: 100]

In the discussion which follows we consider the overarching themes which have most clearly arisen in the first phase of information-gathering, attempt to examine them from different angles and thereby suggest potential ways of beginning to appropriately address the problems.

Young people in residential care – a severely marginalized group

Residential care was once at the fulcrum of services for children in need. Today it falls short of society’s expectations. There is manifestly smaller demand for it and too great a proportion of the few who experience it seem to suffer as a result; they certainly do not benefit as much as they should.

[Dept of Health, 1998: 5]

This quotation – from a Department of Health overview of a research programme on residential care serves to highlight the two main trends within the residential childcare sector within the last twenty years.

The first was the rapid fall in the resident population. In the wake of a radical reappraisal of the place of residential care in the spectrum of services for children in need – partially instituted by a raft of well-documented scandals in children’s homes (see Berridge, 1998: 10-11) – the size of the sector has dwindled.

The numbers of young people living in residential care in England more than halved between 1985 and 1995 – from over 16,000 to 7700 – and there was a parallel contraction of local authority-managed provision. The number of voluntary sector children’s homes reduced substantially too – from over 4000 in the early ‘80’s to around 600 in 1995 (Berridge, 1998).

Whether, and if so, how much the private sector mopped up any unmet demand for residential care placements was (and remains) unclear. Although DoH figures suggest that over the decade the number of children placed in privately-registered homes hovered around 650, Berridge suggests that this is probably an underestimate, since in 1995 there were approximately 180 private homes – a sixth of the total number (Berridge, 1998:13). Current figures on numbers living in private homes are not available.

The second important trend was a concurrent decline in confidence over the merits of residential care and a close scrutiny of who might actually benefit from a stay in a children’s home and how residential care might help,
Inquiries were instigated – Levy and Kahan (1991), Utting (1991), Warner (1992) and Kirkwood (1993) – government-commissioned large scale research was undertaken – the Looking After Children Project and the DoH initiative on Caring for Children Away from Home – and policy developments burgeoned apace (Quality Protects, the National Care Standards Council, etc). The whole sector was put under the spotlight – its sins exposed and the potential means to redemption explored.

As this period of flux ended the residential population plateaued. The rapid decline ‘tailed-off’ in the late ’90’s and the numbers of children looked after in residential care has stabilised at just below 7000 since the turn of the century (DfES, 2003: 41). (The latest figures indicate that this equates nationally to around 1 in 9 of the total looked after population – although this varies considerably, in East Sussex the proportion being nearer 1 in 15 and in West Sussex around 1 in 6).

This would seem to indicate that there is, and will continue to be, a group of young people for whom residential care is the only option.

It is also pertinent to add here that most stays in residential care are for short periods – children’s homes are now generally used as a temporary, emergency stopgap, while other accommodation arrangements are explored (DoH, 1998).

When one considers the implications of this for the subgroups of young people looked after who are the focus of this study it would be fair to say that they represent some of the most socially excluded young people in the country. This has been expressed in populist terms:

> In our experience over the last few years the nature of the young people we are dealing with in care has changed. We have tremendous problems of management with them. What we find is that our community homes contain a combination of the most damaged, deprived, depraved and delinquent children and they are incredibly difficult to work with. And our problem is that we are the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. We pick up these young people when a lot of this damage has been done to them. This problem has become far worse in recent years.
> [Davis, 1997: 31]

But to describe it in a more pragmatic way in relation to a professional response, these young people, both those placed out of their local authority area and those in planned long term care within their county, will

- have exhausted all the other possible options for their care
- in the majority of cases have a set of complex needs

It is often conveniently ignored or forgotten by those who judge their sometimes difficult behaviours that these young people are amongst the most vulnerable in society having endured severe problems in infancy and early childhood.

The desire to ‘condemn more and understand less’ (to paraphrase the words of former Prime Minister John Major in 1993) – is a troubling legacy of the Thatcherite era – and one that often impacts most heavily on those who have least power to respond to the condemnation.

A goal of the ODPM initiative – and one shared by the whole Core Group – to raise awareness of the reality of the situation for young people looked after in residential care – is one that is central to the success of the project. Without such broader understanding efforts to enhance the life chances of this marginalized group may founder.

We discuss this further in the next section.
Perception is a problem

Community perceptions

A theme that runs through the interviews with the Core Group and is underlined in the seeds of this initiative is that of the perception of young people who are looked after.

This is an issue for two reasons.

The first is the slippery issue of how much of a problem there really is.

Many members of the Core Group whom we interviewed alluded to the original outcry over the behaviour of young people in care but indicated that this was fuelled by media attention at the time and suggest that perhaps this group was scapegoated for a more general problem with young people and offending in the area.

Although a high degree of political momentum was initially generated in response to these perceived burgeoning difficulties with out of control looked after young people in Worthing, little evidence was forthcoming on how much actual rates of offending or asb by young people increased during the period when the homes were sited in the area. The only figures that were commonly referred to were those around missing person reports for young people from care (we will return to this issue later).

Overall then, it is impossible to quantify the problem – and few suggestions as to how it might be better quantified. However, there is clearly a problem of perception with regard to the true situation for young people who are looked after in residential care.

The obvious answer to this would be to raise local community awareness and understanding of the reality of life for the young people and thereby to hopefully facilitate a less scapegoating approach to the way they are viewed by their neighbours.

In tandem with this there is perhaps the need to develop positive activities for young people – to engage them more productively when they have free time. However, these are both suggestions that require further consideration if they are to be developed – and neither have been central to the work undertaken for phase one of the research (although one might reasonably argue that the former has been part of the role of the PCSO in Worthing).

Professional perceptions

The second reason why perception is a problem in relation to this group of young people is that there is a lack of understanding amongst those professionals who might be either directly or indirectly working with them.
This concern resonated across the interviews with Core Group members and with staff and young people in the local authority homes.

One example of this was when a manager described the police response to being called to the home:

“Our local officer – Sergeant X – has told us that police officers will address what they see – they will take control of a situation and react to what is happening – rather than approach it with a view to negotiating a successful conclusion for all parties.”

[Local authority home manager]

And a number of the Core Group were happy to admit the inadequacy of their own knowledge in relation to this group:

“This whole process has shown some of the terrible circumstances that some of these children have found themselves in and perhaps now these have been exacerbated by them being placed a hundred miles from their friends and family … from the children’s perspectives they feel completely on their own in a world they are likely to find far more scary than most of us adults.”

[Core Group member]

The ODPM initiative may already be going some way towards raising awareness – perhaps particularly amongst higher levels of management – but there is clearly a need to make further efforts across the relevant agencies to promote better understanding within all tiers of each organisation and amongst front line workers (especially police officers and teachers?).

Allied to this is a more applied recommendation – which flows from other research – that interagency training with residential care staff working alongside front line workers from other agencies would be a positive development (Home Office, 2004).

Different needs

Realist evaluation – the methodology which we employ in our research when looking at the effectiveness of different practice models – is informed by the principle of focusing-in on what works for different service users in different circumstances.

Although there is a tendency to group all young people in residential care together an issue which has clearly arisen during the analysis of data from the first phase of the research is that the identified residential care population across the units is actually a diverse group – and one that perhaps we do not yet have full understanding of.

The two local authority homes involved in phase one both have similar resident populations which incorporate the following features:

- no emergency admissions;
- mid to older teenage young people in their care;
- young people who there is no likelihood of a return home and where fostering is not appropriate – i.e. those who are (at least to some degree) aware and accepting that they will remain in this placement for an extended period of time – often until moving to independence;
young people who have links to family or at least some continuity of a social network which is geographically accessible;

- in most cases ongoing schooling – in others rapid re-integration into education or training.

It is not yet clear how the resident populations of the private homes compare (this may become more apparent during phase two of the study). We do know that the six private homes identified during the first phase:

- are generally smaller – with up to four beds per unit;
- in Worthing are mainly located within a small area near the centre of the town and are managed by five different companies.

Beyond this most of the information we have is anecdotal but suggests that the young people in the homes:

- are likely to have been placed from outside the county;
- may only stay for a limited period of time.

If these suggestions are true it would be reasonable to surmise that these young people

- have been placed away from their home area for a reason (i.e. they may be presenting particular problems which cannot be dealt with in their home area – and these maybe particularly severe in terms of offending, asb, etc – or there may be a lack of suitable placements in their home area);
- will have difficulty maintaining the support of their social network – family and friends;
- will lack any continuity in terms of education.

Clearly there will be differing circumstances for every young person in every unit, but regardless of this there would seem to be a qualitative difference between the situations of those in the privately-run homes compared to those living in units managed by the local authority – those in private care being more likely to be suffering from a worse situation with regard to stability in all aspects of their lives.

Since stability has been identified as a cornerstone of successful working within residential care (Department of Health, 1998; Jackson, 2002) and one that offers a platform for engagement around problem issues in the young people’s lives, this clearly presents those working with this group with additional problems in achieving good outcomes. We will consider more fully the impact of this below in our suggestions for practice responses.

There is a need for the second phase of the research to involve the privately-run homes in addressing the issues. In order to better engage with how to address the particular problems that these homes might be experiencing it is vital to know more about

- the young people who they work with
- how they currently work
- how open they are to adapting their practice to incorporate messages from this research.
What works (in addressing problem behaviour) with young people looked after in residential care? – An innovative approach

There have been a number of suggestions through the data gathering process as to what may work with this group – or more correctly – these groups of young people. There is clearly merit in all the different models which have been utilised already – the use of a PCSO to support young people in the private homes in Worthing, the Trust Level System in the local authority home in Shoreham and the RJ approach in the Hailsham children’s home. We will go on to make recommendations about the potential for further employing these models more widely in a later section of this paper.

However, to spread the net more broadly, it is worth bearing in mind that other initiatives have also been tried in different areas of the country.

One such model, which has been studied by The Children’s Society Research Unit, was recently developed by a children’s rights project in the North West (see Raws, 2005). With funding from the DfES an innovative approach was developed which sought to respond appropriately to a problem with runaways from local authority care (and the concurrent offending, asb and exposure to risk). The project was called the Lancashire Young Runaways Project (LYRP).

Through close negotiation with the local authority and the police – in tandem with a rigorous adherence to the maintenance of an independent (and therefore non-stigmatised) service – a relationship was built with a group of children’s homes (both staff and young people living in the homes) whilst at the same time a rapid response ‘Return home interview’ service was offered for young people who went missing from their children’s home.

This two-pronged approach meant that the project workers came to be

- known to both staff and young people (due to ongoing regular contacts);
- trusted by the young people (through offering a confidential forum to discuss problems – independent of the statutory constraints of those providing care – and enhanced over time by an evolving reputation amongst the young people for being trustworthy and able to achieve results);

Allied to this was an ability to work flexibly and responsively to the issues that the young people raised when more involved direct work ensued after an initial return to home interview.

In the longer term this approach paid dividends which had a wider impact on the situation for the young people – and by default for the staff in the homes, those living in the local communities, for social workers and for the police. The identified outcomes of the project’s work with young people were:

- a reduction / cessation of running away
- a reduction / cessation of offending
- a reduction in substance misuse
- an increase in young people’s sense of self worth / self esteem
- re-engagement / reintegration with education / training / productive activities
- positive change of care placement
- positive change in care environment (in same placement)
- improvements in relationship with family
- a move out of care
- support in transition to independence
- instigation and positive conclusion of complaints / investigation processes

[Rawes, 2005: 11]

And the key elements which contributed to effective practice were:
o young person-centred working
   including having independent status and a flexible response
o an active multi-agency steering group
o good relationships with staff at residential units
o the clear system of rights and entitlements for young people in the looked after system

Overall then, going missing had been the initial focus for the work – and the key to closer involvement with the young people – but working on this presenting issue has served as a means to the broader end of achieving positive change in relation to a number of difficult behaviours.

An exploration of how this model might be adapted and extended for work in Sussex is included in the Recommendations section.

Too many cooks …?

A final thought in terms of this ‘Discussion’ of the key areas to consider in formulating a comprehensive response to these issues relates to a matter that is manifest – although not often given due weight – when reflecting on this group of young people.

It is that they may become overwhelmed – or, perhaps more accurately, underwhelmed by the cascade of professionals who intrude on their existence, march into and out of their lives, all offering differing ‘help’ and sometimes with different and competing agenda.

There are two main effects of this.

For the young people themselves there is a danger that they can become “intervention hardened” – they come to disregard the assurances of the people who work with them (especially if they feel that the help offered in the past has been ultimately ineffectual – that they have been let down), to lose faith in the ability of ‘the system’ and thereby are drained of motivation to cooperate with the efforts of those professionals who seek to help and support positive change.

Combined with the likely ongoing difficulties of their personal circumstances (including a heritage of damage) this can lead to a downwards spiral – to increasing detachment from sources of assistance and to a parallel escalation of problem behaviours … and can make some young people who are looked after extremely ‘hard to reach’.

In the ideal situation residential social workers can offer a lifeline to such young people – but sometimes this does not prove to be the case and this can be because, as ‘agents’ of the SSD and constrained by the care environment, rsw’s are hampered in their ability to break down the barriers.

Attributes of the LYRP approach that proved to be successful in overcoming this problem were independence and young person-centred practice. Workers were liberated from the stigma of a statutory role, able to operate flexibly over an extended period and at the young person’s pace.

By operating in this way project workers could negotiate the barriers that the young people were putting up to other professionals and over time build bridges back to mainstream services:
Project workers were able to get alongside the young people and hear from them what the real issues were.

[Other agency worker]

In addition, the underpinning theories of the RJ approach would appear to offer a better likelihood of trusting relationships developing in residential units. However, perhaps the catalyst of an independent outsider would still be invaluable in navigating difficult times.

The second effect of the presence of an array of ‘interested parties’ in work with looked after young people operates in the opposing direction – i.e. it impacts on the professionals themselves.

This can equate to problems with

- ‘lines of responsibility’ – “Whose problem is this?”;
- communication - and as a result a lack of sharing of information;
- delays in decision-making
- a lack of full understanding of the scale of need for these young people for those professionals who do not have looked after young people as their main ‘business’.

We have already discussed how the latter point might be addressed within this initiative – and the result of this should be an improvement in the other three problems.

However, in order to make progress with dealing with the first three points it is worth considering further a suggestion that was made by an interviewee:

*My hypothesis on why there are problems is that it’s not because every agency is poor or every agency is great – but I think sometimes there is just a lack of communication between the agencies and sometimes that could be overcome if you have someone in the centre who is acting, not as an advocate for the children – that’s a separate role – but acting as the facilitator or as the ‘hub’ between the agencies.*

[Core Group member]

If appropriately developed, this role might incorporate not just acting as the central resource for interagency communication but also as the key person to identify gaps in care planning for individual young people and potentially aid strategic thinking around gaps in service provision.

Logistical and philosophical issues around the siting of this role – the suggestion of the proposer was that it needed to be an independent professional, freed from the constraints of one agency’s interests – would require careful consideration, but it is certainly an idea that would seem to have much merit.

Too many cooks require one – or possibly two – head chefs.

For young people (in terms of direct working) an independent, young person-centred, flexible and dedicated project worker – who could act as an ally ‘outside the system’ – could prove to be key.

For all parties – but perhaps mostly the myriad professionals closely or more loosely associated with this group – a discrete role could be developed with an independent, overarching role.
Concluding remarks

This section has sought to engage with a number of issues that are central to the overall consideration of appropriate responses to the problems at the heart of this initiative.

In the final section which follows we offer recommendations for possible short and long term responses which take these issues into account.
Conclusion

We’re seeking ways for those young people to have a better outcome for themselves at the end of the day … not to be involved in the criminal justice system … ensuring their educational outcomes are better, that they are linked into good support networks for education and social welfare – and that opportunities are as good as they could be.

This quotation from a member of the Core Group summarises the aspirations of the ODPM initiative.

These ideals will require a sophisticated response if there is to be success in meeting them – we hope that the following proposals will prove to be useful in taking the initiative forward.

Before entering into the detail we would wish to reiterate that these ‘recommendations’ come with a number of caveats. Principal amongst these is that some of the evidence offered to us was anecdotal and not backed-up with hard data. This is not to deny the importance of the thoughts and feelings of those who have day-to-day involvement in current practice locally, but more to inject some degree of caution into this process.

Suggestions for potential immediate responses

1) Extension of the PCSO liaison model to a different area

This suggestion requires little further detail – since the model has already been successfully piloted in Worthing and described above.

The advantage of replicating the approach elsewhere – from a research perspective – is that it would be possible to better explore the true effectiveness of the model.

Should this suggestion be adopted we would develop a plan to benchmark the current situation in the new area with regard to perceived (by the local community) and/or actual (in terms of hard data available from homes in the area) problems with offending, asb and running away. We could then track the evolution of the work and after an agreed period collect new data on the ‘problems’ to gauge the effect of the intervention.

It has been suggested during the first phase of the research that Hastings may be an appropriate location to try the model again – since it has a number of private residential care children’s homes sited within a relatively small geographical area.

2) Development of an independent runaways project for looked after young people in Sussex

As described earlier in the ‘Discussion’ section and noted below in the Literature Review, targeted interventions have achieved a degree of success in other areas of the country in working directly with looked after young people. Although these have not been aimed specifically at offending or asb, they have impacted on these problems as a by-product of their main focus.

The main example of this that we are aware of is the Lancashire Young Runaways Project (LYRP). This model is detailed in the previous section, but it has elements of the PCSO model – in that an initial and ongoing goal of the work is around building close relationships with homes, their young people and the staff teams – but with a number of additional advantages:

- professional independence – not stigmatised by association with the statutory sector
- young person-centred model of direct work incorporating flexibility in practice
- children’s rights focus
This innovative approach re-frames the problem behaviour of running away as an opportunity to engage with the young person – via the vehicle of independent return home interviews – and negotiate access to more intensive direct work aimed at dealing with the causes of their difficulties.

Further, it recognises that in many instances behaviour such as running away is indicative of crisis in a young person’s life – and that times of crisis can be times when a young person may be most motivated to change with the right help.

It was found in Lancashire that there was a clear reduction in running away as a result of the work of the project and a concurrent lowering of crime and asb levels in the localities of the children’s homes (Raws, 2005).

In terms of the particular problems identified in Sussex, there was a focus in the initial work done by the PCSO on missing incidents – which were targeted as a prime concern by the police. Additionally, it was stated during the interviews with the Core Group that there was an ongoing problem with the provision of ‘appropriate adults’ for young people looked after in private children’s homes who had been subject to arrest.

There is still a reticence for children’s homes, or social services, to be fair, to act as appropriate adults. What happens is a looked after child is arrested, they are brought into custody, they need an appropriate adult, nobody wants to come out, so they are then having to be dealt with at a later date – which is contrary to the idea that you get caught and something bad happens to you … It should be dealt with – if you get caught stealing or being violent, or something, and end up at the police station, you should feel the weight of something happening to you.

A possible extension of the model which could be considered – again as an initial opportunity to engage with the young people, but coincidentally to plug a gap in local service provision – might be the undertaking of the ‘appropriate adult’ role by workers from the same independent project.

Tailored systems could be developed by the Research Team to monitor and evaluate this element of the work as it was brought on stream during the second phase of the project.

3) Development of “hub” / central liaison and planning role

As discussed briefly in the Discussion section (see p27) this suggestion came from a Core Group member. There would be a need for a proper thinking through of many aspects of this role if it is seen to be important in taking the work forward, but the possible useful facets of the post are as follows:

- an identified point of contact for all agencies involved in cases
- independence would ensure the ability to develop an overview of a case and assist in putting together an appropriate plan in the child’s best interests without being bound by statutory duties
- able to take a leadership role
- able to develop knowledge of local practice and resources and facilitate exchange of information across agencies
- able to identify gaps in understanding / knowledge, practice and resources, and inform development of strategies within and between different services
4) Development / reappraisal of local authority (and private home) / police protocols for reporting of running away (and offending?)

Discussions with staff at the local authority homes involved in the research – and the views expressed by those in contact with the private homes – would indicate that there would be merit in a pooling of good practice in relation to reporting protocols.

Research undertaken in other parts of the country has highlighted the value of good practice in relation to this (see Biehal and Wade, 2002: Rees et al, 2002) – and possibly the key need in Sussex is for the sharing of understanding between the local authority homes and those in the private sector.

5) Consultation exercise to gauge feasibility of piloting different in-house models (RJ or TLS) in new settings – different local authority homes or private homes

In order to ‘test’ / evaluate these models more rigorously there is a need to review their implementation in a fresh setting with comprehensive systems to monitor effectiveness and look more closely at outcomes from the outset.

Prior to this, however, there would be a need to undertake an exercise with all the children’s homes to consider where it might be appropriate to pilot the models.

As discussed in the sections on RJ and TLS there are important considerations in terms of context for successful implementation – especially in terms of the willingness of staff to embrace an approach and the type of young people towards whom the intervention is directed.

Our prior experiences of evaluating new practice would suggest that the former of these points is especially important – and it was stressed by the managers who had developed the RJ approach at Lansdowne House. Here the context at the time of initial implementation made the staff open to new ideas – a situation of crisis with behaviour management within the home had developed and many were keen to seek new solutions.

By contrast, staff teams who feel they are coping sufficiently well will not welcome directives from higher management to change their practice. This was evidenced in Sussex by the example of the Hastings unit where RJ has not been properly implemented despite full training and the efforts of management.

Therefore a consultative exercise with staff teams in homes across the county would be key to the process of introducing new practices to different establishments. It may well be that a staff team in one of the private homes would be very keen to try out a new approach – but without proper consultation, it will be impossible to know this.

An added benefit of this exercise could be a subsequent sharing of professional expertise across the residential care sector in the county. If sites were identified where there was the potential to implement models currently in use in other homes, there would be the potential for ‘twinning’ arrangements, whereby staff could work in a twin establishment to learn about a model in practice and this could be reciprocated during the bedding-down phase within the new site.

As with the proposal for extension of the PCSO model, once a suitable site had been located, the work could be monitored and evaluated following an initial benchmarking exercise.

6) Consultation exercise with young people

An important link in the chain of communications around this initiative that is manifestly absent at this stage is the voices of young people.

Although efforts were made during the first phase of the research to speak to young people in the two local authority units this was only partially achieved.
It would seem not only appropriate, but in fact vital in ‘getting it right’, to make every effort to fully involve young people in the development of any practice initiatives which are intended to impact on their lives.

Too often in the past looked after young people’s views have been absent from the debate around their care – with a distressing legacy:

When one considers the depressing evidence on outcomes for looked after children in adult life, humility about our ability to know what is in the child’s best interest seems to be the appropriate emotion.

[Munro, 2001: 134 – this author’s emphasis]

Longer term impact?

An undercurrent in these proposals is that they will have a combined effect in better meeting the needs of the young people but also more widely.

A fresh focus on the issues around the looked after system in Sussex should help to keep everyone’s ‘eyes on the ball’ – and, hopefully, if developments are well managed, then there will be broader impacts.

Not least among these will be a reassurance for both staff internally and the wider world that the issues are taken seriously and that, in grasping this nettle, policy makers and managers are prepared to think expansively and commit to the long term.

A theme that emerges from the literature is that achieving progress is dependent upon the value attributed to residential care, its staff and to the young people resident within it, both by those working directly in or alongside residential care, and by those within the wider society (Frost et al, 1999).

If appropriately handled the development of the ODPM initiative could contribute to a wider understanding of the situation in the residential care sector and – more directly – could make staff feel valued, boosting their resilience to continue to meet the challenge of caring for “the most damaged, deprived, depraved and delinquent children.” [Davis, 1997: 31]
Literature review

Looked after children in residential care: working towards the prevention of offending, anti-social behaviour and going missing

Summary

- The aims of the review are to:
  - describe the needs of young people in residential care; explore the relationship between placement in residential care and occurrence of offending and antisocial behaviour, and going missing; explore practice and environmental factors that may exacerbate or ameliorate the incidence rates of such behaviours.
  - The review’s objective is to inform thinking on the development of appropriate and effective interventions to prevent offending, anti-social behaviour and going missing among looked after young people resident in children’s homes in Sussex.

The literature suggests that young people who are placed in children’s homes are:

- Generally older than the looked after population as a whole. Children’s homes placements are mainly used for older children and teenagers.
- More likely to be male.
- ‘Looked after’ for a range of reasons, including abuse and neglect, relationship breakdown and due to behavioural problems.
- Likely to have complex needs.
- Represent a concentration of young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

‘Risk factors’ which correlate to the problem behaviours of offending, asb and going missing have been identified in the literature. Additionally:

- Characteristics and experiences of young people placed in residential care correspond with many of the risk factors associated with involvement in anti-social behaviour and crime.
- Present circumstances may represent other risk factors, for example, non-attendance of school or they may become influenced by delinquent peers resident within homes.
- Research has identified a number of issues of concern in relation to young people placed in residential care: involvement in anti-social behaviours within the homes or outside; potential or actual participation in criminal acts; substance misuse; non-attendance in education, through truancy and exclusion; going missing or running away; being at risk of sexual abuse or exploitation through prostitution; experience of being bullied.
- Such behaviours are interconnected and potentially reinforcing, particularly within a residential care context.

Research on residential care practice – of which there has been a considerable amount in the past decade – indicates the following:

- The research emphasises that it is the way that a children’s home is run, as a whole, that makes a difference to the quality of the experience for the children and young people who live there. Consistency and continuity in practice is important and found where homes are small, where heads of home have a clear sense of purpose and a high degree of autonomy, including a say in admissions.
The findings of the research have been incorporated into the statutory National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes issued by the Department of Health in 2001. These represent a baseline for the promotion of good practice in residential care.

The scope of the standards demonstrates that good residential care is dependent upon the implementation and interaction of good practice across different component parts of care management and provision. Only progress within each and every one of these areas is likely to improve outcomes for young people and, therefore, impact upon the prevention of offending, anti-social behaviour and going missing.

Improving practice in children's homes is dependent upon support and involvement from partnership agencies in meeting the needs of young people.

A growing body of research has developed around the concept of 'resilience' – the increasing of protective factors for vulnerable young people and the corresponding reduction of risks.

The concept of resilience can be used to understand risk and protective factors, and to inform planning.

An appreciation of protective factors is useful for the design of preventive strategies. These can be described as factors that promote 'social bonding' and 'healthy standards'. Social bonding is promoted through stable, warm, affectionate relationship with one or both parents (or, presumably carers), and links with teachers, other adults and peers who hold positive attitudes and 'model' positive social behaviour. Healthy standards are promoted through prevailing attitudes across a community; views of the parents; health standards established within schools, and opportunities for involvement, social and reasoning skills, recognition and due praise.

Specific areas on which to focus development of good practice and targeted initiatives are: assisting young people to build trusting and positive relationships; promoting good health and well-being; facilitating involvement and attainment in education, and in leisure activities.

A number of targeted strategies have been employed, aimed at preventing asb, offending and going missing.

In the context of residential care, there are four areas in which it would be appropriate to focus work: behaviour management; countering bullying; notification and responses to unauthorised absences; notification and responses to serious incidents.

Behaviour management strategies need to be consistent and coherent within individual children's homes. Different strategies exist. Examples include cognitive-behavioural approaches; reward based schemes; restorative justice approaches; specialist input from external agencies to support staff or young people.

Effective anti-bullying strategies have been put in place in other contexts, such as schools, and this work may offer opportunities to identify the most 'hopeful' approaches for a residential context. These include mentoring, peer counselling and 'listener' schemes, mediation, group education and discussion, 'no blame' approaches, adult counselling, helplines, and confidential reporting.

Research work on notification and responses to unauthorised absences has culminated in statutory guidance, good practice guidance, the development of interagency protocols between social services and police, and a number of schemes that have been evaluated as effective.

There is limited research on the effectiveness of strategies to reduce offending among looked after children in residential care. The primary focus has been on behaviour management strategies but there also some indications that protocols between police and residential staff can lead to a reduction in the offending rates of young people.
Overall, the literature suggests that a holistic approach for the promotion of positive outcomes amongst looked after children will be key.

- The task for those working to prevent the occurrence of offending, anti-social behaviour and going missing, has to be one that is focused upon improving outcomes for young people living in residential care.

- The review of the research and policy literature suggests that it is not any one approach that is likely to make a difference but a combination of approaches.

- It is also clear that for effective approaches to be implemented responsibility must extend beyond the staff and management of children’s homes. Effective working partnerships are crucial.

- When considering what approaches may be desirable, it may be helpful to focus planning on: the culture and regime within children’s homes, and ways to promote and sustain a pro-social culture among children and staff; the development of therapeutic care for young people placed in residential care, which promotes their resilience by maximising the protective factors present in their current and future lives; the development of targeted initiatives that focus upon going missing and, or, offending.
Literature review

Looked after children in residential care: working towards the prevention of offending, anti-social behaviour and going missing

Introduction

This review is concerned with the use of residential care as a service to children who are 'looked after' by the State, and the occurrence of offending, anti-social behaviour and going missing among children and young people who are living within it.

The term ‘residential care’ encompasses a wide range of services in which care is provided for young people living away from home. It includes children’s homes, secure units, and boarding schools. It is used as a placement for young people in the long-term, short-term or as respite care. Its functions can be summed as ranging from assessment to rehabilitation, looking after young people during a period of family crisis to specialist therapeutic work. The review focuses on the provision of residential care to ‘looked after’ children in the form of ‘mainstream’ children’s homes, as this appears to be more directly relevant to the remit of the ‘ODPM LAC Offending Initiative’.

The aims of the review, informed by a number of discussions with different core group members, are:

- To describe the needs and characteristics of young people ‘looked after’ within children’s homes
- To explore the relationship between placements in children’s homes and the occurrence of offending, anti-social behaviour and going missing.
- To identify practice and environmental factors that may ameliorate or exacerbate the incidence rates of such behaviours.

The review’s objective is to inform thinking on the development of appropriate and effective interventions to prevent offending, anti-social behaviour and going missing among looked after young people resident in children’s homes in Sussex.

Young people who are placed in children’s homes

Similar ranges of characteristics are reflected in the samples of young people who have participated in or been the subject of a number of studies of children’s homes, even though the studies’ vary in the definitions and measures they use.

An overview of a programme of research on residential care undertaken during the 1990s describes, “children in residence [as] a small, unusual sub-group of all children in need”, who are likely to have “complex and demanding problems” (DOH, 1998; 20). This concentration of young people with complex and high levels of (varying) need is attributed to the reduction of actual numbers in care, as well as in the range of, residential placements available and to the lack of appropriate alternative placements (such as specialist fostering) (Wade et al, 1998; Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998).

Children in residential care are generally older than the looked after population as a whole, and the older a child is on admission to substitute care the more likely he or she is to be placed in a residential setting (Wade et al, 1998). They are also more likely to be male.

The reasons that young people living in residential care are ‘looked after’ vary. For example, the following were summarised as the predominant reasons for entering care in studies on children’s homes. Sinclair and Gibbs (1998a; 1999) found that young people had become looked after due to their behaviour (sometimes criminal), abuse or neglect that they had suffered, or due to a breakdown in relationships that had either accompanied these situations or taken place independently of them. Whitaker at al (1998) found a wider range of
circumstances precipitated entry to residential care. Young people became looked after: due
to a short-term crisis (such as family illness); due to the death or loss of a key carer; due to
being rejected by a carer, which was sometimes connected to the young person’s behaviour
or a parent forming a new relationship; due to being abused or neglected by a family member
or someone close to the family; and some young people elected to come into care due to
experiencing difficulties at home. There is some evidence to suggest that a higher proportion
of young people placed in independent homes are looked after due to problems associated
with their behaviour, rather than due to relationship difficulties or being in danger or neglected
(Gibbs and Sinclair, 1998a).

An increase in the prevalence of emotional and behavioural difficulties in the residential
population is clearly documented by the research, although the difficulties are seldom clearly
defined in type or severity. Berridge and Brodie (1998) found that the proportion of entrants to
residential care posing behavioural problems prior to entry had more than doubled in the ten
residents found that 64% were known to Therapeutic Social Work or CAMHS out-patient
teams, or had had some contact with them in the preceding 5 years. Of them, 93% presented
with ‘what was generally described as emotional and behavioural problems’ (p80).

Street (1999) identifies increases in the rates of emotional and behavioural disorders among
the youth population in general, and in the population living in residential care. Among those
in residential care, she notes a “marked shift towards the majority showing more overtly out of
control and aggressive behaviours both verbally and physically” (p168). A study (McCann et
al, 1996) of the prevalence rate of psychiatric orders in adolescents looked after aged 13 to
17 in one local authority found that 96% of adolescents living in residential units were
identified as having a psychiatric disorder.

The studies evidence a range of internalising and externalising behaviours, which pose,
either, an immediate or long-term risk to a young person and/or to someone around him or
her. Internalising disorders are described as those “in which the child’s internal difficulties are
expressed as acting-out behaviours… [and] aggression, hyperactivity, inattention and defiant
disorders frequently occur”. Whereas in “internalising disorders, the child’s difficulties are
expressed as disorders of mood, shown by emotional states like anxiety, depression and
withdrawal” (Empson et al, 2004; p120).

At risk of offending, anti-social behaviour and going missing

A recent youth crime briefing (NACRO, 2005) provides an overview of factors that have been
associated with the onset of offending. Risk factors are classified as falling within four
domains – family, school, community and personal (incorporating individual factors or those
related to peer group experiences). With reference to these domains, the risk factors
associated with each are summarised as follows:

- **Family** - poor parental supervision and discipline; family conflict; history of criminal
  activity; parental attitudes that condone anti-social and criminal behaviour; low
  income; and poor housing.

- **School** - low achievement beginning in primary school; aggressive behaviour,
  including bullying; lack of commitment, including truancy; and school disorganisation.

- **Community** - living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood; disorganisation and neglect;
  availability of drugs; and high population turnover, and lack of neighbourhood
  attachment.

- **Personal** - hyperactivity and impulsivity; low intelligence and cognitive impairment;
  alienation and lack of social commitment; attitudes that condone offending and drug
  misuse; and friendships with peers involved in crime and drug misuse.
A review of research on risk factors within the different domains concludes that, “the relationship between risk and protective factors, and the precise ways in which they interrelate is uncertain. It is, however, clear that risk factors cluster together in the lives of the most disadvantaged children; and the chances that those children will become anti-social and criminally active increase in line with the number of risk factors” (Youth Justice Board, 2005; p14).

Given the background of the young people living in residential care, the possibility that the social care, health and education services will not fully (or perhaps, even partially) meet their needs, and the particular features associated with living in a group care setting, it is perhaps unsurprising that links have been made between the experience of living in residential care and involvement in offending, committing anti-social acts in the community or home, or in going missing. Research has consistently identified the following as issues of concern in relation to populations of young people in residential care:

- Involvement in anti-social behaviours within the homes or outside (e.g. Sinclair and Gibbs, 1999; Home Office, 2004)
- Potential or actual participation in criminal acts (e.g. Taylor, 2006)
- Substance misuse (e.g Home Office, 2004)
- Non-attendance in education, through truancy and exclusion (e.g. Brodie, 2001; Wade et al, 1998)
- Going missing or running away (e.g. Wade et al, 1998)
- Being at risk of sexual abuse or exploitation through prostitution (e.g. Barter et al, 2004; Farmer and Pollock, 1998)
- Experience of being bullied (Barter et al, 2004; Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998)

The extent to which some of these behaviours and risks are interconnected and, potentially, reinforcing, particularly within a residential setting, has also been raised as a matter for concern.

Living within a peer group setting is likely to influence young people’s behaviour, and whether or not the influence is positive or negative is likely to be depend upon the dominant culture within a home.

Studies have drawn attention to the existence of subcultures with homes (Taylor, 2006). For example, Sinclair and Gibbs (1998) exploring the degree to which young people felt they had been exposed to pressures or temptations since arriving in a particular residential home found that a significant proportion felt pressured by the offer of drugs (cannabis, cocaine and other drugs), being encouraged to get drunk or sniff glue or to steal, and had experience of being physically harassed. They noted that proportions were higher for those in local authority homes compared with independent homes, and linked this to the increased potential for young people in local authority homes to maintain contact with their friends and visit the ‘same haunts’.

Research on youth crime and criminality emphasises the influences of peers: “having delinquent friends reinforces any predisposition towards crime and makes it more difficult to break out of a pattern of offending behaviour” (Audit Commission, 1996; p75).

Studies have identified a link between running away and involvement in offending (Wade et al, 1998; Graham and Bowling, 1995; Abrahams and Mungall, 1992). It has also been a consistent theme in the literature on residential institutions (Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998). For example, an NCH study found that 46% of runaways from residential care had previous criminal convictions, compared to 7% of reported runaways from home, and for male runaways from residential care this figure rose to 70% (Abrahams and Mungall, 1992).
Sinclair and Gibbs (1998) suggested that young people with previous convictions were far more likely to run away than those who had none, and that those who ran away were far more likely to be convicted while living in the home. This association between running away and being convicted while living in a children’s home was particularly strong for those who had no previous convictions, which, they argue, suggests that young people were led into offending by other residents.

Wade and al (1998) found that some young people began offending prior to their admission to care and ran away from their placements (usually residential) to continue doing so. Others began offending once they were looked after, either because they were enticed or to gain acceptance from peers and avoid bullying, which was rife in certain units. In some cases, offending occurred during ‘group escapes’ from children’s homes, which had a strong criminal sub-culture. In others, individuals committed opportunist crimes while away in order to survive on the streets.

Studies have consistently identified a close association between running away and school non-attendance through truancy or exclusion (Safe on the Streets, 1999; Wade et al, 1998; Rees, 1993; Abrahams and Mungall, 1992). Other research has shown that there are often serious problems with school attendance for young people living in residential placements (Audit Commission, 1996; Brodie, 2001). Wade and Biehal (2000) suggest that the relationship between school non-attendance and running away is reciprocal rather than causal.

Once these patterns become established they are mutually reinforcing (Safe on the Streets, 1999; Wade et al, 1998). For some of those looked after, non-attendance began prior to entry to care, however, young people in residential care were often affected by a culture of non-attendance apparent in some children’s homes. In addition, a lack of appropriate or adequate provision by education authorities for young people experiencing difficulties at school meant that many young people drifted for months without regular education and consequently without structure to their daily lives, making them more likely to be led by their peers into the seeming attractions of going missing (Wade et al, 1998).

**Improving practice in residential care**

There is a growing body of literature that focuses upon what makes for good quality care and effective practice, management and leadership in a residential setting (Whitaker et al, 1998; Berridge and Brodie, 1998; Department of Health, 1998).

The research emphasises that it is the way that a children’s home is run, as a whole, that makes a difference to the quality of the experience for the children and young people who live there. For example, homes where ‘turbulence’ or being ‘out of control’ (Sinclair and Gibbs, 1999), where going missing (Wade et al, 1998) and peer violence (Barter at al, 2004) were less of a problem were homes with a consistent and coherent approach.

The leadership style of the head of home was found to be a key factor that influences a children’s home regime and its effectiveness in dealing with difficult behaviour (Berridge and Brodie, 1998; Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998). Consistency and continuity was found where homes were small, where the head of home had a clear sense of purpose and a high degree of autonomy, including a say in admissions. In these homes the emphasis was on building positive and trusting relationships between staff and young people, and a high commitment to education.

To some extent, the messages that emanated from this research are embodied in the National Minimum Standards for Children’s Homes, which are designed to meet the regulations established in The Children’s Homes Regulations 2001 (Department of Health, 2002a). A total of 36 standards are stipulated relating to different aspects of residential care planning and provision, each of these has a specified and intended outcome (a summary of these is attached as an appendix). The regulations are mandatory - children’s homes must
comply with them. The “standards are designed to be applicable to the wide variety of different types of establishment that come within the category of children’s homes, and to enable rather than prevent individual homes to develop their own particular ethos and approach to care for children with different needs” (p3). The document details ways in which the standards can be met in practice, at least from a procedural point of view.

What the scope of the standards demonstrates is that good residential care is dependent upon the implementation and interaction of good practice across, what could be described as, different component parts of care management and provision. They are organised around different topics - planning for care, quality of care, complaints and protection, care and control, environment, staffing, management and administration, and specialist provision. Each of these areas emerged in research findings as areas that have been problematic and need to be addressed in practice. Only progress within each and every one of these areas is likely to improve outcomes for young people and, therefore, impact upon the prevention of offending, anti-social behaviour and going missing. By working towards the standards, children’s homes are likely to increase the possibilities for closer and more effective working partnerships with other agencies; however, positive outcomes for young people living with the homes are dependent on these agencies also fulfilling their roles and responsibilities.

A theme that emerges from the literature is that - achieving progress is dependent upon the value attributed to residential care, its staff and to the young people resident within it, both by those working directly in or alongside residential care, and by those within the wider society (Frost et al, 1999). An increase in the value attributed is likely to occur with greater recognition of the level of need and potential contribution of the young people involved, and the work that is done within children’s homes.

Resilience: increasing protective factors and reducing risks

In the context of the ODPM initiative, this section focuses on a number of areas of young people’s lives to consider practice that may promote better opportunities and outcomes, and thereby reduce risks for young people. It uses the concept of ‘resilience’ as a framework for understanding risk and protective factors, and for practice and planning. Discussion within these areas incorporates findings of research and policy related to residential care as well as that focusing upon crime prevention and youth justice.

As an overview, it is helpful to bear in mind the findings of a Youth Justice Board review that notes although “some protective factors are individual characteristics that it may be difficult, if not impossible, to instil in children who lack them... [e.g. being female is protective] there are other protective factors and processes with a more obvious and important contribution to make in the design of preventive strategies” (Youth Justice Board, 2005; p7). These are described as ‘social bonding’ and ‘healthy standards’. Social bonding is promoted through stable, warm, affectionate relationship with one or both parents (or, presumably carers), and links with teachers, other adults and peers who hold positive attitudes and ‘model’ positive social behaviour. Healthy standards are promoted through prevailing attitudes across a community; views of the parents; health standards established within schools, and opportunities for involvement, social and reasoning skills, recognition and due praise.

Assisting young people to build positive and trusting relationships

The National Minimum Standards for Children’s Homes require that children enjoy sound relationships with residential staff based on honesty and mutual respect; they provide clear guidelines on how this should be achieved within the home (DOH, 2002a).

The research literature makes it clear that this is a difficult task for residential staff in the face of short-term, transient placements and the inability of many young people to trust and form relationships given their past experiences. The changing group dynamic and particular mix of young people within a group care setting can add to the complexities and challenges that staff
face in working to provide care or control, but it is also how this is handled and worked with by the staff that is crucial to the experience of young people living within it (Hicks et al, 1998).

The provision of a stable placement is crucial if positive and trusting relationships are to be developed and sustained over time, which in turn are crucial to a child’s development (Howe, 1995). However, Gilligan (1997) also points out that although permanency is desirable, in the context of promoting resilience, it is important to focus upon the present and promote positive relationships, even if it is only to be in the short-term, as it is possible that such experiences may represent a ‘turning point’ for young people.

Within a residential context, there is potential to build relationships on an individual and group basis (Thompson, 1998; Frost et al, 1999). Barter et al (2004) emphasise the value of strengths-focused group work building on the insights and experiences of young people themselves. They remind the reader that professionals often make the mistake of focusing on the small proportion of someone’s behaviour that is problematic, and ignore the much larger proportion that is socially acceptable and competent.

How behaviour is managed within a placement is likely to impact on the capacity to build positive and trusting relationships. For example, young people’s views on the use of restraint have illustrated the damaging affect that inappropriate or excessive usage can have on the formation of relationships (Morgan, 2004).

Work in building relationships can and should extend beyond the immediate placement (Gilligan, 1997). There is a need for practice to encourage purposeful contact with family members and other key adults from a child’s past. Gibbs and Sinclair (1998) when comparing independent homes with local authority homes found that “their residents saw their families less frequently [and] missed them more” (p524). This may reflect a broader issue with the difficulties that independent homes may find, particularly if distant from the responsible authority, in providing care as part of an integrated local authority plan. Gilligan (1997) draws together evidence that shows that positive ties with siblings, grandparents, or even well functioning neighbourhoods may be protective for a young person in care.

Frost et al (1999) pick up on the potential to build relationships within the immediate local neighbourhood and community to breakdown potential hostility and suspicion directed towards children’s homes. They suggest that inviting local residents to visit the home and/or involving staff in local community activities may promote positive links and relationships within the community.

Gilligan (1997) draws attention to the importance of encouraging friendships with peers, who are potential members of current and future social networks and thereby, vital sources of potential and precious social support. Peer and adult mentoring services have been used in a variety of contexts, and are considered to have considerable value for young people who are ‘looked after’. Mentoring has also been identified by the Youth Justice Board (2005) as an effective programme strategy to address or counter a number of risk factors - namely, aggressive behaviour, including bullying; lack of commitment to education, including truancy; alienation and lack of social commitment; individual attitudes that condone problem behaviour; early or friends involvement in problem behaviour.

Promoting good health and wellbeing

The National Minimum Standards for Children’s Homes require the physical, health and emotional needs of each child are identified and appropriate action is taken to secure the medical, dental and other health services needed to meet them. Again, guidelines are provided on the procedures aimed at meeting this standard.

Additionally, the Department of Health (2002b) provides more extensive guidance for local authorities, which are required to promote the health and wellbeing of looked after children. The guidance emphasises the importance of regular assessments of children’s health and for individual health plans that are reviewed. As stated above, many young people placed within
residential care have complex needs and may be in need of specialist treatment or support. Research has drawn attention to the fact that psychiatric disorders are often unidentified and therefore remain untreated (For example, McCann et al, 1996).

Payne and Butler (2003) suggest in their review of research relevant to the promotion of mental health among looked after children that:

- The earlier in life preventative work begins, the more likely it is to be effective.
- Preventive work needs to be disorder, context and objective specific.
- Focused, highly structured programmes targeting risk factors or problem behaviours are more beneficial than generic, unstructured interventions such as providing counselling or group discussion;
- Longer term strategies are more likely to be helpful than short lived initiatives;
- Interventions which focus on systems or contexts within which children live (e.g. school, family, neighbourhood) as well as on the child are more likely to be successful than interventions which focus on the child alone.

The same review draws attention to the potential offered by improvements in consultation and support to ‘tier one’ services (encompassing non-specialist residential and social workers) by specialist social workers, educational psychologists, paediatricians and first line Child and Adolescent Mental Health professionals (psychiatrists, psychologists and community psychiatric nurses). These professionals may be able to help children with behaviour problems unresponsive to ‘first tier’ interventions.

Effective interventions in the promotion of good mental health are likely to impact on the prevention of anti-social behaviour and offending. Given the commonality in risk factors, it is also possible that the general points made in relation to effectiveness may apply to preventive work in targeting anti-social and offending behaviour.

**Education**

As mentioned above, research has consistently identified school non-attendance as an area for concern in the context of residential care.

In the National Minimum Standards, a number of requirements are made to ensure the education of children is actively promoted as valuable in itself and as part of their preparation for adulthood. These incorporate the requirements for a Personal Education Plan for each child and, notably, the requirement that each child of compulsory school age, who is not in school, has an educational programme in place and is supported to find appropriate full-time educational provision. They also draw attention to the importance of providing children with facilities that are conducive to study and to do homework, and that they are actively encouraged and supported their studies. Further guidance is available to local authorities regarding their role in meeting the educational needs of looked after children (DfES and Department of Health, 2000).

Gilligan (2000) emphasises that “it is important that professionals and caregivers working with children in need appreciate the academic, social and developmental importance of positive school experience” (p41) and summarises a number of positive affects that it can have. For example, a sense of belonging to school can enhance academic performance and motivation and emotional wellbeing and may also be protective against behaviours risky to health.

A review (Hunt, 2000) focusing on educational performance of children in need and children looked after distils a number of messages from the research and provides recommendations for frontline workers, schools, and an agenda for local education authorities and social services. It identifies ‘looked after children’, particularly those in residential care, and those out of education as groups ‘at risk’. For front line workers, the review suggests there are a number of ‘simple things’ that can be done. For example, involving everyone who can help a young person with their education, buying a book every few weeks and helping a young
person to build up a collection, being alert to educational opportunities at school and elsewhere, and encourage efforts made by a young person.

**Leisure and activities**

Standard 15 of the National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes documents the need to ensure that young people are able to participate in a range of appropriate interests and leisure activities. It documents a number of requirements that include ensuring a proper balance between free and controlled time in the structure of the day and providing opportunities for young people, as individuals and as a group, to give their own views about the general running of the home, leisure activities, and their own experiences.

Gilligan (2000) writes of the importance of spare time activities in enhancing resilience. He identifies five areas of spare time activities that may be helpful to young people – cultural pursuits, the care of animals, sport, helping and volunteering, and part-time work. Importantly they may fill time and provide structure and a precious sense of purpose in daily living. Additionally, they may help with: developing social skills; enhancing a sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem; strengthening social networks in the present and future, as they may represent a ‘passport’ to social contacts in new contexts in the future; may introduce young people to positive role models, either peers or adults, who share their interests and may take on a mentoring role; and may promote physical fitness.

The Audit Commission (1996) and more recently Youth Justice Board initiatives (e.g. Positive Futures and Positive Activities for Young People) emphasise the potential that involvement in constructive activities, such as sport, may have for promoting physical health, self-esteem and self-efficacy, and contact with peers who offer more positive role models. Hunt (2000) also suggests that involvement in leisure activities may assist in promotion of attendance and attainment in education.

**Targeted strategies for preventing anti-social and offending behaviour and going missing**

**Behaviour management**

The National Minimum Standards for Children’s Home encapsulates many of the recommendations from the research on improving approaches to behaviour management. For example, consistency in approach is a key theme in the research and underpins requirements such as the need for a clear, written policy, procedures and guidance for staff based on a code of conduct setting out the control, disciplinary and restraint measures permitted and emphasising the need to reinforce positive messages to children for the achievement of acceptable behaviour.

Research into children’s homes frequently emphasises that the residential social work task is far from easy. Staff face significant challenges in managing the behaviour of residents, and studies have consistently drawn attention to the affects of morale on the capacity for staff to effectively and appropriately manage behaviour (Heron and Chakrabarti, 2003; Briggs, 2004). Increased morale is associated with better clarity of purpose, which, as already discussed, is engendered by clarity and consistency in the leadership offered by heads of homes and assisted by greater specialisation (Gibbs and Sinclair, 1998).

Research evidence counsels on the deleterious effects of ‘burn out’ on residential staff’s capacity to manage behaviour. Appropriate, adequate and ongoing training for staff is a consistently recommended by the research literature, as is effective and supportive management. McGuiness and Dagman (2001) explores the affect of cognitive emotional reactions of care staff to difficult child behaviour, and concludes that they have a prominent role to play in understanding how staff respond to difficult behaviour – “their understanding of the causes of difficult behaviour, in particular the attribution of controllability, plays a crucial
part in self-reported effort in helping” (p301). Briggs (2004) provides an account of how his role as a consultant, ‘using himself as the container of staff emotional states’, was successful in engaging staff and assisting them to restore their capacity to think and respond effectively and appropriately to difficult behaviour.

Previous research has identified a lack of therapeutic approaches to behaviour management in residential care (Berridge and Brodie, 1998). Stevens (2004) notes that interventions dealing with behaviour have a propensity to be focused on control and restraint, and explores the potential that cognitive-behavioural approaches may have for addressing behavioural problems within a residential setting. In summary, she concludes that the use and efficacy of cognitive-behavioural interventions has raised some interesting questions for residential child care – one issue relates to the assessment of young people and their readiness to be able to benefit from cognitive-behavioural interventions; the capacity of residential staff to implement interventions effectively, and the issue of generalisation to the wider world in the longer term. Importantly, she makes the point that “studies seemed to indicate that the integration of cognitive-behavioural interventions with other aspects of the young person’s life such as peers or parents or school was important to generalisation” (p244). However, specialist cognitive behavioural projects have proven to be successful, at least in the short-term, in working with persistent young offenders (Youth Justice Board, no date)

Specialised input from other agencies (e.g. police and health workers in youth offending teams) was found to be “extremely helpful” in the case studies conducted by a study focusing on preventative approaches with young people in residential care (Home Office, 2004). Consequently, the report recommends the facilitation of interagency training for home staff and other professionals to develop skills among residential staff and awareness among other agencies of the challenges faced in residential work. It suggests that home managers should receive advanced training with an emphasis on techniques for prevention, such as restorative approaches, rather than containment of anti-social and offending behaviour.

Restorative approaches to behaviour management have been implemented in schools and youth offending teams in recent years. National evaluations have provided recommendations to facilitate better implementation of approaches, although they have been inconclusive, perhaps due to short time scales, in their evaluation of the overall effectiveness of such approaches (Youth Justice Board 2004; Wilcox and Hoyle, 2004). Restorative justice approaches have been identified as a potential area for development in residential care, but there is little identifiable evidence documenting its effectiveness in promoting more positive outcomes for young people. Available evidence focuses upon small-scale initiatives, where the indications are that it promotes a more positive, and less punitive, environment and as a result may effect change in behaviour over time (Littlechild, 2003).

A Home Office (2004) consultation exploring preventative approaches with young people in residential care found that potentially valuable approaches included reward schemes.

Countering bullying

Research has consistently identified bullying as prevalent within institutional care settings (Farmer and Pollock, 1998; Gibbs and Sinclair, 2000; Barter et al, 2004). Experiences of being bullied have been linked to going missing, being pressured into committing offences, and acting as a perpetrator has been identified as a risk factor for continued involvement in anti-social or offending behaviour. Therefore, effective strategies to counter bullying are likely to form an important part of an overall strategy to prevent going missing and offending.

For the first time, children’s homes are required to have an explicit policy to counter bullying within placements (Department of Health, 2002): “the registered person has a policy on countering bullying which includes: a definition of bullying, which is reviewed frequently with staff and children, which includes bullying by staff and bullying that may occur elsewhere than in the home and which covers different types of bullying, and which includes name-calling; measures to prevent bullying and to respond to observed or reported bullying; training for staff in awareness of, and effective strategies to counter, bullying” (p27).
Barter et al (2004) notes that “experience in working with groups of young people in residential and non-residential contexts has now explored many possible approaches to reducing bullying and other peer violence, including mentoring, peer counselling and ‘listener’ schemes, mediation, group education and discussion, ‘no blame’ approaches, adult counselling, helplines, and confidential reporting” (p223). They argue that they are not necessarily amenable to transfer into a residential care setting but represent a good enough start to identify the most hopeful approaches.

**Absence of a child without authority**

Children’s homes are required to have written procedures identifying action to be taken when a child is absent without authority, and these must cover: searching for any child missing or believed to have run away; reporting missing children to the police, to the child’s placing authority and to others (including parents) subject to consultation with the placing authority (this will include a risk assessment of the likely danger to a child); the collection and return of a missing child when found; and the action to be taken on the child’s return (Department of Health, 2002).

Biehal and Wade (2002) draw attention to the potential benefits in joint protocols between the police and the local authority for young people who go missing from care or home. Joint protocols can provide valuable clarification of the respective responsibilities of social services staff and the police regarding children missing from care. They can also facilitate close cooperation between local authority departments, the police and voluntary or independent agencies to exchange information, plan services and make an early response. Biehal and Wade (2002) suggest that consultation with residential staff and field social workers regarding the framework for risk assessment is desirable, in order to agree broad definitions of vulnerability. Subsequent to risk assessment, decisions can be made as to the action to be taken, including the decision as to whether the police should be notified. Categories of absence may include unauthorised absence (where a child may stay away without permission, their whereabouts are known and they are not considered to be at risk) or missing (where a child’s whereabouts is not known and there is cause for concern, either due to the child’s own vulnerability or the danger they pose to themselves). These categories may assist in clarifying the role of the police and social services in responding to incidents.

Detailed guidance (Biehal and Wade, 2002; LGA and ACPO, 1997) derived from research, policy and practice in going missing from care is available.

Evaluation of schemes working directly with young runaways – including projects for those in the looked after system – has shown the merits of focused intervention (Rees et al, 2005). Specific project work targeting missing from home incidents amongst looked after young people has been piloted and evaluated as having an effect on reducing occurrence and improving other outcomes for this particular group (see Raws, 2005).

**Notification of significant events**

Interestingly, there is no explicit reference to definitions of, or strategies for dealing with, offending behaviour in the National Minimum Standards for Children’s Homes, although it forms an implicit part of many of the standards. The registered person within a home is required to have a system in place to notify within 24 hours the persons and appropriate authorities of the accordance with Regulation 30. Regulation 30 necessitates that the police must be informed if there is an allegation that a child accommodated at the home has committed a ‘serious offence’, or if there is involvement or suspected involvement of a child accommodated at the home in prostitution. However, it appears that this may be an area that requires further guidance in practice, as the research has repeatedly picked up on issues relating to “potential over-reporting and the subsequent criminalisation of young people in
residential care” due to the occurrence of minor incidents (Home Office, 2004; p11; Taylor, 2006).

A Home Office (2004) consultation project reviewed practices in three local authorities and found a range of formal and informal approaches to the reporting of offending behaviour in residential homes. Protocols were developed due to a recognition of high levels of offending among looked after young people; estimates of the costs and diversionary impacts of police time spent on often inappropriate incidents; the view of police and home managers that some care staff were abdicating their behaviour management responsibilities; and a view that the police were not responding as rapidly to call outs. Protocols established thresholds for reporting (which varied across the different authorities) and set out expectations as to what behaviours should be managed by whom.

In a review of a formal approach adopted by one of the authorities, the protocol was found to have a number of key benefits, including:

- A dramatic decrease in the number of (reported) incidents.
- A change in approach by care staff, who were more inclined to focus on the outcomes for young people and the prevention of criminalisation: “the protocol has led to a more reflective, consistent, considered and preventative approach – making staff think what could have been done differently”.
- Confirmation of the home’s responsibilities for the behaviour of their residents, and of young people’s responsibilities for their own actions.
- Different options being considered, such as restorative justice approaches and involvement in educational projects for offenders and those at risk of offending (e.g. where time is spent at a young offenders institute).
- The development of stronger links - between homes, bringing exchange of ideas and good practice, and between agencies, including the local authority, police and YOT, leading to additional collaborative activities.

The report emphasises that the process of devising and embedding the protocol, and the shared understandings this facilitates can be as important as the product itself. The development of shared understanding and increasingly collaborative approaches was identified as a positive feature of the informal approaches adopted with the other two local authorities reviewed.

**Developing a holistic approach for the promotion of positive outcomes and the prevention of offending, anti-social behaviour and going missing**

Research suggests that young people who are placed in children’s homes have complex and multiple needs, arising from their troubled experiences during the time that they have lived with their family and, or, the time they have spent ‘looked after’.

Their needs are often unmet, by their previous and current placements, by education or leisure services, by health or mental health services, and as a result they can become further disadvantaged and gradually more ‘disaffected’. In such circumstances, their already complex needs are compounded and therefore become increasingly difficult to meet.

As a result, these young people are often labelled as the ‘most difficult’ (p58) to engage with, support or contain (Sinclair and Gibbs, 1999), which, arguably, in turn can influence the efforts made to meet their needs (Taylor, 2006). Without their needs being adequately met, there is potential for a ‘downward spiral’ to develop where the life chances and opportunities for these young people diminish and risks for their mental health, involvement in offending or anti-social behaviour increase. The combination of such multiple disadvantages are likely to carry both immediate and long-term risks.

The task for those working to prevent the occurrence of offending, anti-social behaviour and going missing, has to be one that is focused upon improving outcomes for young people living in residential care. The review of the research and policy literature suggests that it is not any
one approach that is likely to make a difference but a combination of approaches. It is also clear that responsibility extends beyond the staff and management of children’s homes and effective working partnerships are crucial. When considering what approaches may be desirable, it may be helpful to focus planning on:

- The culture and regime within children’s homes, and ways to promote and sustain a pro-social culture among children and staff.
- The development of therapeutic care for young people placed in residential care, which promotes their resilience by maximising the protective factors present in their current and future lives.
- The development of targeted initiatives that focus upon going missing and, or, offending.
References


Appendix: Summary of standards and outcomes provided for in the National Minimum Standards for Children’s Homes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning for care</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Statement of home’s purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Placement plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Moving in and leaving the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Preparation for leaving care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Support for individual children</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Quality of care</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Consultation</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Privacy and confidentiality</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Provision and preparation of meals</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td>Personal appearance, clothing, requisites and pocket money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td>Good health and well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td>Treatment and administration of medicines within the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td>Leisure and activities</td>
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**Complaints and protection**

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<tr>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td>Complaints and representation</td>
<td>Any complaint will be addressed without delay and the complainant is kept informed of progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td>Child protection procedures and training</td>
<td>The welfare of children is promoted, children are protected from abuse, and an appropriate response is made to any allegation or suspicion of abuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td>Countering bullying</td>
<td>Children are protected from bullying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td>Absence of a child without authority</td>
<td>Children who are absent without authority are protected in accordance with written guidance and responded to positively on return.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td>Notification of significant events</td>
<td>All significant events relating to the protection of children accommodated in the homes are notified by the registered person of the home to the appropriate authorities.</td>
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**Care and control**

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<tr>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td>Relationship with children</td>
<td>Children enjoy sound relationships with staff based on honesty and mutual respect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td>Behaviour management</td>
<td>Children assisted to develop socially acceptable behaviour through encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive staff response to inappropriate behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>---------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location, design and size of home</td>
<td>Children live in well designed and pleasant homes designed to meet their needs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>Children enjoy homely accommodation, decorated, furnished and maintained to a high standard, providing adequate facilities for their use.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bathroom and washing facilities</td>
<td>Children’s privacy is respected when washing.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Health, safety and security</td>
<td>Children live in homes that provide safety and security.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Staffing</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vetting of staff and visitors</td>
<td>There is careful selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers working with children in the home and there is monitoring of visitors to prevent children being exposed to potential abusers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff support</td>
<td>Children are looked after by staff who are supported and guided in safeguarding and promoting the children’s welfare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequacy of staffing</td>
<td>Children receive the care and services they need from competent staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequacy of staffing</td>
<td>Staff are sufficient in number, experience and qualification to meet the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequacy of staffing</td>
<td>Staff receive training and development opportunities that equip them with the skills required to meet the needs of children and the purpose of the home.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management and administration</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring by the person carrying on the home</td>
<td>Monitors the welfare of the children in the home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring of the operation of the home</td>
<td>The care of children accommodated in the home is monitored and continually adapted in the light of information about how it is operating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business management</td>
<td>Children enjoy the stability of efficiently run homes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s individual case files</td>
<td>Children’s needs, development and progress are recorded to reflect their individuality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure accommodation and refuges</td>
<td>Children living in secure units or refuges receive the same measures to</td>
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</table>
safeguard and promote their welfare as they should in other children's homes