

UPDATE- CARE LEAVERS TASK GROUP INTERIM REPORT- 18/11/15

Report of the Head of Children's Social Work and Child Protection

1. Background to report

In May 2015 Ofsted published the inspection report on services for children in need of help and protection; children looked after and care leavers in Devon. The Ofsted judgement on the experiences and progress of care leavers was 'inadequate' and a number of recommendations were made.

In November 2015, People's Scrutiny completed an interim review on progress. The Scrutiny review led to 5 recommendations:

1. That the arrangements for the preparation to adulthood for care leavers in transition are significantly improved upon to ensure that personal advisors are allocated by the 16th birthday for all care leavers.
2. That the County Council needs to increase to 100% the involvement of care leavers in their pathway planning.
3. That the County Council work more closely with district, city and borough councils on issues relating to care leavers housing with senior officer attendance at all Devon Homelessness Prevention Partnership meetings.
4. That the County Council and district authorities continue to strengthen their corporate parenting arrangements and responsibilities.
5. That the County Council re-examine its commissioning arrangements in relation to supported accommodation, to include the allocation of an officer from social care commissioning to work specifically on care leavers housing with the districts.

This report seeks to update Scrutiny Members on the significant progress and improvements in these areas in the last 12 months and to assure members that continuing to improve outcomes for care leavers remains a priority within children's services, across the Council and with partners.

2. Progress against recommendations

2.1 Recommendation 1: Preparation for adulthood

There are 787 care leavers (OFSTED classification used). The service has now maintained contact with 80% of these young people, improving from 70% in 2015/16. The Local Authority has a significantly improved its tracking and understanding of this cohort. Of those we are not in touch with 12% have advised they wish to have no contact, have returned to birth family for over 6 months and tragically in 4 cases the young people have died. When these additional figures are taken into account, we are not in touch with only 8% of our young people. Due to DCC not previously engaging with these 27 young people all efforts are being made to regain contact and advise them of their rights and the support available.

All care leavers with whom we have been in contact have an allocated Personal Advisor. The staffing complement of Personal Advisors to the Permanency and Transition Teams was increased by 6 workers to meet the rising numbers. These workers are now allocated at 16.

The progress for young people who are not in education, employment or training (EET) is showing an improving trajectory as the figures have increased within the year from 34.4% to 47.9 % in EET.

Greater understanding of the cohort is also in place with of those NEET, 13% (136) are identified as having a significant disability but within the cohort 30% are identified as having some form of disability. 7.4% are unable to work due to pregnancy and parenting. With variances this means that 38.3% of young people are not attending training, education or employment.

2.2 Recommendation 2: Involvement in Pathway Planning

The participation team with colleagues from the virtual school devised a Personal Occupational Progression Plan (POPP) which replaces the Pathway Plan at 16. Devon's POPP has gained National interest and acclaim.

The number and quality of Pathway/ POPP plans is tracked up to the age of 18 by the Independent Reviewing Unit (IRU) through the reviewing process. The progress of young people within their education is tracked by the Virtual School /College up to the age of 21. Further support is available by 'Careers South West' after this age up to the age of 25. This new process is leading to a number of improvements in how care leavers are supported to independence.

There are new mechanisms in place to ensure educational support is activated swiftly where there is young person who, through the school review process, is identified as having difficulties in college or school. Care Leavers entitlements have also been amended so those young people who are undertaking, training, apprenticeships and education are able to gain more financial support. This encourages aspiration and long term economic sustainability.

Aspiration for our children in care has also enabled priority within the council wide work on the new apprenticeship scheme currently being put in place and more work experience opportunities. Additional opportunities at an earlier age are also being offered, for example year 10 students were offered free STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) courses during October half term to encourage future occupation in this field.

The number of young people being supported to attend university and higher education (level 4) courses also increased this year with the number rising to 23. The full figures will be published by the Virtual School and College in December 16.

2.3 Recommendation 3; Work with District Councils on Homelessness prevention

There has been significant work completed with our housing colleagues to ensure care leavers and those young people on the edge of care aged 16/17 receive a more cohesive service from both the County and District Councils. There had been some challenges in agreeing new ways of working and the development of shared protocols, processes and procedures. The joint 'Homelessness Prevention Event' in October 2016 has significantly improved relationships and a follow up event on the

8th November 2016 will focus on good practice, pathways, processes and any blockages.

The current figure for suitable accommodation is 80% an increase from 71% within the year. However, only 2.5% are in unsuitable accommodation, 2.1% are in custody and 12.8% refused to engage or their whereabouts are not known. It is this latter group where efforts are currently being concentrated.

The New Joint Protocol with DCC, the Department of Work and Pensions and the job centres has enabled care leavers to initiate benefit claims 6 weeks prior to their 18th birthday. This ensures there are fewer delays in them gaining accommodation. The job centres have identified care leavers as a priority group and personally engage with them, giving a more in depth service.

The protocol 'Transition to Adulthood' has also ensured that for young people with additional needs there is a refreshed transitions path to adult services.

2.4 Recommendation 4; strengthened Corporate Parenting arrangements

The Corporate Parenting agenda is now more fully cascaded across the County. Members and partners better understand their role as a corporate parent. This has been evidenced through improved partner and member engagement at the Board and Forum. The positive protocols mentioned earlier in the report have been initiated through the corporate parenting agenda.

The guide to being a corporate parent is now given to all council members and training is made available to all members from the first induction and throughout the year. Members have also been encouraged to meet staff members from other services such as MASH and initial response teams for them to gain greater understanding of how the whole service can contribute.

The multi-disciplinary Corporate Parenting Forum is timed to coincide with Council, enabling more council members and officers to attend. This has enabled sharing of information and the building of relationships which has brought greater problem solving. Within these fora officers update members on the progress made in all areas including child protection, looked after children, education and care leavers.

Members have fully participated in joint training with the Participation Team. Members also undertake roles on the Fostering Panel and are Independent Visitors to the Atkinson Secure Children's Home. Significant engagement has also been evidenced recently with the Care leavers Xmas event with members across the District Councils and health colleagues volunteering and offering financial support.

The Lead Member now co-chairs the Corporate Parenting Board with a Care Leaver. Within this board there is more individual and detailed scrutiny of performance and its minutes are forwarded to members. It also oversees the Forum agenda.

The Lead Member also chairs the Virtual School Governing Body and ensures that the education performance of children in care and more latterly that of care leavers is scrutinised. The Participation Team and the voice of the child are embedded within all these forums.

Devon County Council was a full participating member of The New Belongings government initiative and the subsequent review. This enabled external independent scrutiny to the work undertaken. This enabled DCC to gain support to embed

corporate parenting. The Participation Team of care leavers has been integral in all areas to embed good practice and use feedback from children in care and care leavers. This has been evidenced within the Social Work Academy training of new social workers, apprenticeships, induction and recruitment at all levels. More information can be found at

<https://secure.toolkitfiles.co.uk/clients/23786/sitedata/files/Independent%20Ev.pdf>

The Chief Executive has been fully involved with the New Belongings project and recommendations. This includes:

- Young people requested that we implement a rent Guarantor Scheme for care leavers in the same way that parents would be guarantors for their own children. This is in place and in the past two months 8 young people have gained this protection.
- The Chief Executive has also fully supported the Care Leavers Christmas Day which enables young people who are alone at this time to come together, have Christmas dinner and support each other.
- The Health Needs Assessment and subsequent multi -disciplinary steering group has ensured that the needs of looked after children and care leavers are embedded across the CCG's contracts and health policies.
- Young people raising that they needed more work experiences and opportunities. Devon Strategic Partnership heard from young people and offered work experience and apprenticeships which are being followed up across the Council by representatives.

2.5 Recommendation 5: Improves commissioning of accommodation;

There is a national shortage of accommodation for young people and new housing benefit changes in April 2017 may impact upon care leavers, the impact of this is currently being reviewed.

The housing needs of care leavers are considered across the South West Peninsula. There is a responsible commissioner ensuring ongoing sufficiency of placements both for children in care and for care leavers.

In-house provision of supported accommodation has increased by 20% and is seen within the fostering service as a priority. External provision is also growing with providers recently taking part in the Homelessness Prevention Day.

Care Leavers 'entitlements' are now completed and information is available on the Stand up Speak up website <https://www.standupspeakup.org.uk/>. This ensure all care leavers are able to have a clear and easy to read guide to what it means to be a care leaver, what they are entitled to and what additional support is available to them. The New Devon payment card also means that the Local Authority can provide payment on a card rather than in cash format giving greater scrutiny and enabling better auditing.

'This Report has no specific equality, sustainability or legal implications that are not already covered by or subsumed within the detailed policies or actions referred to therein'

3. Current priorities

- Placement Stability for Care Leavers and Children In Care
- Improve the monitoring and quality of Pathway Plans and POPPs
- Ensure there is sufficiency of accommodation for Care Leavers

- We remain in touch with 100% of our Care Leavers
- Ensure that the EET figures improve to 70%
- Implementation of the 'Devon Card' for young people to have easier access to their entitlements.

Future improvement plans include;

- Apprenticeships and work experience opportunities are available for all Children in Care which are aspirational and ensure long term economic prosperity.
- Availability of Health services who understand the specific needs and experience of Care Leavers
- Care Leavers continue to shape our service.
- Meet the expectations of the Government Paper: Keep on Caring July 2016. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keep-on-caring-supporting-young-people-from-care-to-independence>. This includes training care leavers to become Personal Advisors, all Children in Care to have access to a place on the National Citizen Scheme and to gain mentors for Care Leavers

4. Summary for Recommendations

The report highlights the work completed to meet the recommendations raised by the scrutiny report. This work is ongoing and forms part of the Childrens Service Improvement Plan which is monitored by the Corporate Parenting Board.

Vivien Lines

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Skills: Councillor James McInnes

Chief Officer for Childrens Services : Jo Olsson:

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

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