

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
06 APRIL 2016
CARE LEAVERS - UPDATE
REPORT OF HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. This report is to update the children and young people scrutiny committee on the work undertaken by the Leaving Care Service.

2. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 introduced new requirements on Local Authorities for Looked After Children, so that they have the support they need as they make their transition to adulthood. Further legislation; Volume 3: Planning Transitions to Adulthood for Care Leavers dictates statutory responsibilities required by the Local Authority in respect of children eligible for Leaving Care Services. Depending on when a child came into care they have slightly different access to support as the 1989 Children's Act gives greater protection and support to children with a long term care history.

3. Local Authorities are now judged on their service delivery to care leavers and this is regulated by Ofsted. National statistics show that care leavers are more likely to have problems with crime, drugs and mental health than their peers.

4. As corporate parents, responsible authorities are required to provide support to defined care leavers in the same way reasonable parents should provide support for their own children. We recognise that transitions for Looked After Children should not just start on their 16th birthday and preparation for a time when they will be no longer Looked After needs to be integral to their care planning. The Leaving Care Service have developed the 'Life Skills' booklet to work with parents/carers to assess young people's abilities to live independently we acknowledge for some of our children the path to adulthood will be challenging and often turbulent.

5. The 1989 Children's Act requires that all young people Looked After require a **Pathway Plan**. These plans are based on and include their care plan and will set out the actions that must be taken by the Authority, the young person, their parents/carers and a full range of agencies, so that each young person is provided with the services they need. Key areas covered are Health, Education, Employment and Training (EET), accommodation, contact with family/friends and financial information/capability. The pathway plan is reviewed six monthly or earlier if there is a significant life event that takes place e.g. being released from custody, pregnant, moving accommodation. The Leaving Care Service ensure young people where ever practicable, participate fully in their pathway planning and their wishes and feelings are clearly recorded.

6. Once a young person ceases to be Looked After and becomes a Care Leaver, they will be allocated a **Personal Advisor** (PA). Three months prior to their 18th birthday, or when it is known they will be leaving care, the allocated

PA will work alongside the social worker to ensure transition is supported. PA's will be the initial source of advice for young people as they become adults and leave the care system. PA's will support care leavers with basic information and assistance to develop practical skills, information about finances (how to access housing benefit, Universal Credit, Income Support or ESA etc). They will provide support re: housing information, information about education, employment and training opportunities, information about health and wellbeing and leisure opportunities. Communication is at the heart of any interactions the PA may have with care leavers.

7. The Leaving Care Service also support our **Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children** (UASC) as they become care leavers and as long as they remain in appeal in respect of their immigration status, they continue to receive services.

8. Personal Advisors are responsible for visiting care leavers at no less than two monthly intervals and for ensuring records are kept up to date for each care leaver.

9. On Leaving Care, the Looked after Nurses prepare an important **Health** Information pack for Care Leavers (Health Passport) within this it will highlight their own medical history from their time in care, but also any family medical history information that may be needed in their adult life.

10. The **welfare** of all our care leavers in the local community is a top priority for our local authority. Safeguarding ensures that Care Leavers are kept as safe as possible by identifying needs and any risks they face. We work closely with our Children In Care Police Officer, who also supports the safety of our care leavers. We also report care leavers missing to the Police when necessary and make referrals to Adult Services for extra support if a care leaver is seen to be vulnerable. We work closely with Probation for our care leavers that leave custody and make referrals to relevant agencies if issues around Domestic Violence or Sexual Exploitation are identified.

11. As a Local Authority we are responsible for ensuring young people have **suitable accommodation**. Nottingham City has a strong and robust protocol with Nottingham City Homes (NCH), to ensure when young people leave their care placement; their new home is suitable to their needs and linked to their wider plans and aspirations. The team work closely with Housing Patch Managers to ensure young people are supported to sustain their own tenancies. Those young people living outside their 'home' Authority will be supported to access suitable accommodation. The Team do not use bed and breakfast as suitable accommodation.

12. The Leaving Care Service promote the '**Staying Put**' framework for young people not ready for independent living. Or who choose to remain with their foster carer's post 18. Some young people will be supported to remain in their

semi-independent placement if it is assessed as to be in their best interest. The numbers of young people 'Staying Put' continues to increase.

13. The Leaving Care Service recognise that some young people require the support of **Adult Services** post 18. The Transitions Social Worker also sits within the Leaving Care Service. This role is to support any child in care that will not meet full Adult Social Care, but will qualify for some Adult Care Services. The Transitions Social Worker will undertake an assessment and ensure appropriate housing and support is identified so the care leaver is not left vulnerable.

14. The Service are committed to ensure as many of our care leavers as possible are engaged in **Education, Employment and Training (EET)**. Our performance has been lower than our statistical neighbours and we are aware we need to focus on this area. We now have a dedicated PA who is developing bespoke programmes for care leavers to enable them to engage in Education, Employment and Training, particularly those identified as the most vulnerable and dis- engaged young people. For some young people part of their programme includes counselling/mentoring and coaching. This helps them build resilience and give them skills to build confidence and self-esteem so they can move forward. Since starting this programme we have improved the number of young people being willing to take up these opportunities to train and work bringing us closer to the expected performance measures. ASDAN (Curriculum developing organisation and Awarding Body) accreditation and volunteering certificates to build CV's are utilised. Since August 2015 25 care leavers have started the programme and 8 have recently completed their ASDAN Awards. This programme is recognised by the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP), as a job seeking programme. We are working with care leavers leaving custody to set up a bespoke programme with them, so on release they are engaged and put at less risk of re offending. The team have strong links with the three dedicated workers from FUTURES to further ensure opportunities and support is available. We currently have 11 young people at University who we support and provide finances and accommodation when required. The Leaving Care Service wish to celebrate the achievements of care leavers, we have done this in conjunction with Children in Care in the past, but wish to arrange an event just for our care leavers. So are looking to arrange an achievement celebration in October to coincide with National Care Leavers week. We want to do this with input and guidance of our care leavers.

15. Those young people resuming programmes of education or training after the age of 21 can continue to have support of a PA up until the age of 25 and sometimes beyond.

16. Apart from recording their personal views in relation to their life plan in their pathway plans, the Leaving Care Service has set up a **care leavers support group called 'Your Voice'**. This group meet to look at and discuss any issues that may be affecting care leavers. This group links with and supports work also undertaken by the Children In Care Council. They meet approximately every six to eight weeks. They have recently undertaken some

work with the Placements Service, providing feedback as to their time in semi-independent accommodation when in care. This information and a set of questions the Care Leavers have produced will help the Placements Service with their review and recommissioning of semi-independent provision. Some care leavers will also be part of visiting some of the potential new providers to undertake some quality assurance visits and provide feedback on the proposed accommodation.

17. The Leaving Care Service are active members of the National Leaving Care **Benchmarking** Forum (NLCBF). There are now over 85 Authority members from across the Country who meets to discuss best practice and have regular policy updates and speakers from OFSTED and DfE. This forum has been vital in us shaping our service ready for our next OFSTED inspection. This also allows us to share and learn from good practice and quality assure our work, setting targets to drive good outcomes.

The National Care Leavers Strategy is currently under review. The NLCBF members are inputting in this review in conjunction with Rob MacPherson, Team Leader for children in care with DfE.

18. List of attached information

None

19. Background papers, other than published works or those disclosing exempt or confidential information

None

20. Published documents referred to in compiling this report

None

21. Wards affected

Citywide

22. Contact information

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