

Corporate Parenting Board – 17 May 2021

Care Leavers Annual Report 2020/21

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Summary of issues (including benefits to citizens/service users):

This report outlines the work undertaken and progress made by the Leaving Care Service since the Ofsted Inspection in Oct/Nov 2018.

It is the Annual Report on the Service, to update the Board on services provided to young people transitioning from care into adulthood.

Recommendations:

- 1 That the Board continues to support and understand the duties required of the Leaving Care Service.
- 2 To approve the proposals for service redesign of the Leaving Care Service.

1 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 Nottingham City Council has a duty to provide services to those young people defined as Care Leavers under the Statutory Guidance; The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations; Volume 3, Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers, The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

1.2 Research and practice shows that young people who have been in care will have the best chance to succeed as adults if those providing transitional care and support take the following principles into account:

- Is this good enough for my child?
- Provide a second chance if things do not go as expected.
- Is the support package tailored to a young person's individual needs?

These are the principles that Nottingham City Council's Leaving Care Service uses to underpin the service they deliver to our Care Leavers. The service ensures that each young person has a Pathway Plan that outlines the support to be provided which is tailored to meet their individual needs and is reviewed regularly to ensure their transition into adulthood is successful.

1.3 The Leaving Care Service provides a range of services to young people defined under the Leaving Care Act as 'Qualifying', 'Eligible', 'Relevant' or 'Former Relevant', the

definitions for which are set out within statute and relate to the amount of time that a young person has spent in care and their age at the point they left care.

1.4 Nottingham City Council has a duty to provide and sustain young people defined as Care Leavers with suitable accommodation. The Act defines suitable accommodation as the following:

- That which is reasonably practical and suitable for the young person concerning their needs.
- That which the responsible Authority finds satisfactory concerning the character and suitability of the landlord/provider.
- Accommodation that complies with Health and Safety legislation.
- That which takes into account young people's views, training, education and employment needs.

1.5 As the majority of young people approach their 18th birthday, they will be working towards gaining their own tenancy. The Leaving Care Service works closely with Care Leavers to support them to identify suitable accommodation. There is a robust housing protocol in place, which enables Care Leavers to be a priority for housing, with the aim being to ensure our young people are provided with good, safe, quality accommodation. In addition, in specific cases, a direct offer of accommodation is made by NCH to a Care Leaver, rather than the typical bidding process for accommodation. That said there are challenges in identifying accommodation for some young people, particularly those with support needs. This is in part a reflection of the wider challenges of demand versus capacity for social housing. We have seen that due to Covid it has taken longer to identify tenancies for young people, as the availability of one bedroom flats has become stretched; this is because current tenants are not moving, and due to delays in repairs to properties as Covid restrictions limit others being able to enter properties to carry these repairs out in preparation for the young person signing for a tenancy.

1.6 Personal Advisors work closely with NCH Housing Patch managers to ensure young people are provided with the necessary support to sustain their own tenancies. NCH will share information if young people are struggling and there may be a risk to their tenancies. NCH provides support to young people regarding finances and is well accessed by young people. Where young people are facing particular difficulties the Leaving Care service will meet with other agencies to try to identify plans to address these.

1.7 As of 28th April 2021, there are 25 young people 'Staying Put' post 18 years of age in their former foster placements. In 2019/2020 there were a total of 102 young people who remained with their foster carers. Out of 67 Asylum Seekers (former UASC) within the Leaving Care Service, there are 21 Asylum Seekers awaiting the decision from the Home Office whom Nottingham City Council support with finances and accommodation. We currently support 31 asylum seeking young people in total, although 10 of these now have status and are awaiting their benefits claim.

1.8 For a young person in care where it is considered that their needs post 18 will require support from Adult services there is a Transitions process implemented through a Transitions Panel. The allocated children's worker will be attending the Transitions panel to discuss their case; and if it is felt the young person is likely to, or may require post 18 support, the allocated children's worker will be requested to make the referral to Adults for transition support. Once a referral has been received by Adults, they will then screen this and if appropriate will work alongside the allocated children's social worker up to 18. They

will be assessing eligibility for care and support under Adults and housing may be part of that.

1.9 During Covid we have worked closely with the Mental Health Foundation, developing wellbeing packs that are both digital and physical. The foundation also provided 30 phones with unlimited data to ensure that the most vulnerable were able to access this support. The funding for this is finishing in May 2021. There will then be an evaluation and we are hopeful that this service will continue to support those care leavers who may struggle with isolation, but not meet the criteria for Mental Health services in Adults.

1.10 Over the past twelve months, we have seen significant challenges in relation to Covid. We have been creative to ensure that at times when face to face visits were deemed too high risk we have used text messages, phone calls and WhatsApp to keep in contact with the young people we work with. Many of our young people have enjoyed this form of communication and fed this back to us in a participation survey in September 2020.

We asked care leavers *“How well do you feel listened to by the Leaving Care Service 0-10 (10 being always by everyone)”*, 30/35 young people answered 7-10, 14 of these responses being a 10. One young person signed *“Happy”*, one young person did not answer. *“My PA (Personal Advisor) listens when I need him to. He responds ASAP to messages”*

“My PA is always there for me – even when I am shouting and stressed”

When asked *“What do you think about the service from Leaving Care since COVID?”* comments emphasised the range of support that has continued to be offered, and the creativity of Personal Advisors in responding to need. This question shows the importance of us keeping in contact and of consistent supportive relationships.

Feedback emphasised how important it is for young adults to feel listened to, both by those that are working directly with them, and the Council as a whole, as Corporate Parent. We are developing the participation offer for young adults to be able to feedback and contribute to shaping the future of the service.

Since the summer of 2020 care leavers have been included in the returns to the DFE in relation to the department’s contact with young people. This has ensured robust oversight of those who are not engaging and managers have reassured themselves that all efforts are being made to have some form of contact with the young person.

1.11 Current performance with regards to Care Leavers and suitable accommodation stands at 94.7% (Q4 2020/2021). For 2019/2020 our figures were 89.7%. One of the issues affecting this performance is that young people in custody are not counted as being in suitable accommodation. We currently have 18 young people in custody which accounts for the majority of the 5.3% not in suitable accommodation.

1.12 All young people eligible for a Pathway Plan are allocated a Personal Advisor (PA). Within Nottingham City Council these are not qualified Social Workers, they are workers who have the necessary skills, passion and expertise to work with Care Leavers. This includes providing information and support in relation to finances, housing, health, education, training and employment. 92% of Pathway Plans have been completed within timescales, i.e. the last six months. They are the key professionals for co-ordinating Care Leaver support.

1.13 New Statutory guidance determines that local authorities now retain a role as Corporate Parent to care leavers up to the age of 25 years (previously Care Leavers would have a PA up until 21 years of age unless in Higher Education). Young people are now able to continue to receive support when they reach age 21, or to request PA support at any point after age

21 up to age 25, even if they had previously indicated they did not want support. During the year 2020/21 there were 188 contacts from young people aged 21-25 asking for support, this does not include those who remain open due to being at university or any Asylum seekers that we are supporting as these remain allocated to a PA.

1.14 In addition, new statutory guidance requires local authorities to consult on and publish a Local Offer for its care leavers. The Local Offer was initially published in November 2018 and provides information about all the services and support that is available to care leavers from the local authority, including information about both their statutory entitlements as well as any discretionary support. The Local Offer sets out what support all local authority departments will provide (not just Children's Services). We are currently reviewing the Local Offer, looking at increasing the offer to include access to an Aspiration Champion and work experience within the city council.

When asked what they thought, care leavers commented that they had benefited widely from the Local Offer, including Council Tax exemption, YEI, Staying Put, Setting Up Home allowances, priority access to housing and University support. Several specifically mentioned that they appreciated the support of their PA. *"I think it's [the Local Offer] brilliant, really good; I actually searched online to find out more about the Local Offer"*

1.15 The number of young people engaged in education, employment and training (EET) is crucial in ensuring young people succeed in transitioning successfully into adulthood. The Leaving Care Service employs an Employability and Training Support Coordinator who works alongside other Personal Advisors, EET Providers, voluntary organisations, Futures and internal Departments to ensure young people are engaging with education, training or employment. For Q4 2020/2021 our figures for those engaged in EET was 68.4%. Our performance in this area has improved year on year since 2017/18 when performance was at 57.3%.

1.16 The Leaving Care Service have launched an in-house employability programme that supports Nottingham's most disengaged and vulnerable care leavers to make positive steps towards training and employment. The programme is recognised by the DWP as a genuine, progressive job seeking provision for care leavers. The programme provides bespoke opportunities that aim to build a young person's confidence and give them the support that they need to develop the good habits and skills that are essential to sustaining mainstream training or employment. Each bespoke programme gives young people the opportunity to gain meaningful work experience under the guidance of a mentor, provided by an ever increasing network of community partners and internal Nottingham City Council services.

1.17 In addition, the Leaving Care Service has become a registered centre for the delivery of ASDAN courses and all young people have the opportunity to achieve employability qualifications (from entry level to level 2).

1.18 Due to Covid, the annual Achievement Awards had to be cancelled in 2020. We are hopeful that this will be able to go ahead in 2021. The event taking place at the Council House, celebrates the successes of our care leavers. Young people will continue to receive recognition for their achievements across 6 categories; Education, Employment, Apprenticeships, Employability, Contribution to Service Improvement and Outstanding Achievement. In addition to receiving awards for their hard work, young people and their guests enjoy celebrating their success with a 3 course meal and live entertainment by local artists who give up their time to perform for free. The event is usually sponsored by a number of our key partners who provide support and opportunities for our care leavers to enter and progress in EET.

1.19 The Ofsted Inspection in October 2018 identified that the quality of the Leaving Care service has improved since the previous (pilot) inspection. The inspection report comments that:

An increasingly experienced team of personal advisers provides dedicated support to care leavers and uses a range of creative efforts to keep in touch with those vulnerable young people who are harder to engage. A responsive duty service ensures that young people's well-being and wider needs are swiftly addressed. This provides opportunities to develop more trusting relationships with care leavers, and, in turn, to engage them more fully and improve their circumstances.

Specialist workers in the Leaving Care team provide additional capacity and support to personal advisers in order to reduce risks for care leavers and better meet their needs. Good use is made of the 'Shared Lives' scheme to provide extra help to vulnerable care leavers who stay with their former foster carers. This provides continuity of care and stability. The dedicated children in care police officer successfully supports restorative justice interventions, and there have been impressive reductions in offending rates over the last two years.

1.20 The transition from Children in Care to Leaving Care remains one of the most significant challenges for our young people and our service. We have in the past twelve months focused a great deal of effort to address some of the clear issues that present during this time. Our work with Barnardos and the Mental Health Foundation is hoping to assist with appropriate accommodation for those who are struggling but do not meet the criteria for Adult Social Care, those who are struggling with their mental health and loneliness, alongside developing Aspiration Champions for both Children in Care and Care Leavers.

1.21 The Transitions panel has recently been set up to take place monthly, this will look at those young people aged 16.5 to 18, to ensure that we are planning and putting in place all appropriate services at the earliest opportunity to assist with this transition.

2 BACKGROUND (INCLUDING OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION)

2.1 The Board have a corporate duty to understand and promote the services that Nottingham City Council has to undertake legally, to promote the outcomes and opportunities of its Care Leavers.

3 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED IN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 None.

4 FINANCE COLLEAGUE COMMENTS

4.1 None.

5 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT COLLEAGUE COMMENTS

5.1 None.

6 STRATEGIC ASSETS & PROPERTY COLLEAGUE COMMENTS

6.1 None.

7 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 An EIA is not required because the report does not contain financial proposals or decisions.

8 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS OTHER THAN PUBLISHED WORKS OR THOSE DISCLOSING CONFIDENTIAL OR EXEMPT INFORMATION

8.1 None.

9 PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO IN COMPILING THIS REPORT

9.1 The Children Act, 1989; Guidance and Regulations, Volume 3, Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers.

9.2 The Children (Leaving Care) Act, 2000.

9.3 Children and Young Persons Act, 2008.

9.4 The Children and Social Work Act 2017.