

Children and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel

**Agenda
Item No.**

14th April 2015

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Title of the Report: Progress against recommendations identified by the Care Leavers Working Group report

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr B Cassidy – Children and Young People

Executive Summary:

The report provides an update of progress against recommendations arising from the Care Leavers working Group report.

Reason for scrutiny:

In July 2014 the Children's and Young People's Scrutiny Panel established a Care Leavers Working Group to undertake a focused piece of work on what it was like to be a care leaver in Walsall. In October 2014 the final report was published. The report identified twenty recommendations to help make the lives of young care leavers in Walsall as good as they can be. A progress report was submitted to panel in January and enclosed report details the progress against the recommendations of the working group since this time.

Recommendation

That members note the progress against the working group's recommended actions.

Background papers:

The final care leavers working group report.

Resource and legal considerations:

None arising directly from this report.

Citizen impact:

None arising directly from this report.

Environmental impact:

None arising directly from this report

Performance management:

There are no performance management issues arising directly as a result of this report.

Equality Implications:

Care leavers are a vulnerable group at risk of social exclusion and poor life chances. The recommendations seek to improve services and facilities to Walsall's Care Leavers.

Consultation:

None

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BRIEFING NOTE

TO: Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel

DATE: 14 April 2015

**RE: Progress against recommendations identified by the Care Leavers
Working Group report**

Purpose

To provide a further overview of progress against recommendations arising from the Care Leavers working Group report.

Background

In July, 2014 the Children's and Young People's Scrutiny Panel established a care leavers working group to undertake a focused piece of work on what it was like to be a care leaver in Walsall. In October 2014 the final report was published. The report identified twenty recommendations to help make the lives of young care leavers in Walsall as good as they can be. An initial progress report was submitted to Panel in January 2015. This report seeks to provide a further update.

The recommendations have been listed under seven broad themes and the progress update against each recommendation is detailed below:

1. Environment

- **That consideration be given as to whether Townend House is the most appropriate location for the Social Work and Transition and Leaving Care Service in the medium to long term.**
- **That every effort should be made to improve the environment which young people are expected to wait in at Townend House.**

Progress:

At present no viable options for re-location have been identified however the re-location of the Corporate Parenting service from Townend House remains under review as part of the wider plans for Children's Specialist Services.

Since the last report the waiting area at Townend House has been improved with the area having been painted and new carpets and furniture having been purchased. The Social Action Project Co-ordinator continues the poster project with young people which will help ensure the area is decorated in a manner pleasing and appropriate for young people.

2. Out of hours support:

- **That a review of out of hours provision take place and be reported to the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel detailing the outcome of the review within the next three months.**
- **That the availability of 'out of hours' provision be communicated to all care leavers to ensure that all care leavers are aware of the support in place.**
- **That a list of common scenarios which occur 'out of hours' together with details of who to contact be produced. This should be provided to each young person as they leave care and existing care leavers, in paper format**

Progress:

As per the last report the young people have identified that they would like us to work with them in developing links with agencies which can provide a 'talk to' scheme, provided by a service that understands their issues to enable them to have emotional support out of office hours. Commissioning colleagues are briefed and are working with us to identify and engage local voluntary and charitable support schemes to determine if there is scope to agree local arrangements. The viability of having a menu of services available through a range of organisations to support care leavers both in and out of office hours continues to be explored.

Focused work on the development of a volunteer scheme to enable the be-friending of young people is to commence during April. Young people have been involved in the development of a bid to take part in the New Belongings 2 programme and have included the development of the 'talk to' and volunteer schemes as an aspect of the bid.

The Transition and Leaving Care website is due to be launched on the 29th April. The website has a helpful links page which gives details of services which may be of use to young people both in and out of hours. The New Belongings Group continue to develop the common scenarios which will be added to the website and also distributed in paper form by Personal Advisers as part of the pathway planning process.

3. The journey to independence

- **That further training be offered to foster carers to ensure that there is a consistent approach when preparing young people for independence;**
- **That consideration be given as to whether more could be done to encourage continued support by foster carers after the child has left care, either in an informal or a formal basis.**
- **That an update on the uptake of 'Staying Put' in Walsall be submitted to the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel within six months**

- **That an update on the take up of training be submitted to the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel detailing alternative provision within the next six months.**

Progress:

A dedicated 'vision for independence' project group has been established which includes members from the fostering service, residential services, the social work service and the care leaving team. The aim of the group is to develop a common approach across services to support children and young people become happy healthy adults. The project group is seeking to look at the child's journey through care from the point of admission to leaving care, to understand what the Local Authority and others can do systemically to improve outcomes through the development of a clear model of practice which enables children to grow to their fullest potential and transition to adulthood with the life skills and emotional resilience to lead a successful and happy adult life. This is to be linked into a wider workforce development project focusing on the development of social pedagogic practice and shared formal training opportunities will be made available as an aspect of this work.

There has been a significant reduction in the budget for training Walsall's foster carers which has meant that there have been no new formal training opportunities for carers; themed group supervision is being established to enable across carer learning and reflection regarding independence. Staff from Children's Homes are to facilitate some specific sessions for carers on areas such as menu planning and financial management. Consideration is also being given as to how Walsall Foster Care Association could be utilised in a more pro-active way to encourage the continuation of on-going relationships between carers, children and young people. This is to be explored through established liaison meetings

Staying Put

We currently have 14 young people in Staying Put arrangements, which is an increase of four young people since the last report. Children's Services 'Staying Put policy remains under review. Consultation with C4K, New Belongings and Foster Carers concluded on the 23 March 2015. The final draft of the policy will be available by the 17 April 2015 and will be made available to Scrutiny Panel for their oversight and comment. The policy will be included in the procedures manual as part of the July update. The commissioning team and family placements continue to work to ensure that we have the right support and agreements in place for both 'staying put' young people and their carers. Briefings will be arranged across the service once the policy has been approved.

4. Accommodation

- **That a full report, detailing the number of young people affected by the changes to supported accommodation, together with confirmation that they had been re-accommodated, be considered by the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel within three months**

- That all existing supported accommodation be spot checked to ensure that all matters relating to security are in working order and effective - an update of findings to be considered by the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel within three months.
- That the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel include the new Regional Framework arrangements for the provision of supported accommodation in the 2015/16 work programme to ensure that the provision for young people in Walsall is sufficient to meet the needs of the cohort.
- That prior to receiving a monitoring report on the implementation of the working groups recommendations Members of the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel revisit young people and Supported Accommodation facilities in the borough.
- That the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel be consulted on the strategy for Supported Accommodation once developed

Progress:

A full report regarding the changes to supported accommodation and the impact upon young people was received at the last Panel meeting. In March 2015 two of the Care Leaver working group members have had further meetings with young people who occupy shared tenancies. Further opportunities can be arranged.

As per the previous report Personal Advisers continue to check young people's accommodation during visits.

The process for identifying the most appropriate accommodation for young people has now been implemented, with accommodation being sourced through the placements and resources team. The supported accommodation strategy has now been agreed and has been included within the sufficiency strategy.

5. Money

- That the system in respect of the setting up home grant be revisited to make it more transparent for young people and provide them with more ownership of the funds available to them.

Progress:

Colleagues from Systems Thinking have assisted with a review of the financial systems in the Care Leaver Service and have been helpful in undertaking some benchmarking with other Authorities.

As a result of the work undertaken improvements made to date include:

- Confirmation by HMRC committee that VAT can be re claimed on setting up home grant purchases. The impact for young people is that there is more money available to young people for their setting up home grant.

- Staying put arrangement set up with the housing benefits team to claim housing benefit back for relevant arrangements. This has helped to create a joined up and lean system which ensures housing benefit is claimed back internally for all eligible young people reducing pressures on young people, carers and to the staying put budget
- A nominated officer from the welfare rights service has been providing welfare benefit support and debt advice directly from the TLC offices in partnership with the young person's social worker or personal adviser. This has ensured young people are getting the correct help and advice when they need it.
- Work flows have been finalised in respect of the current process for the administration of the 'setting up home grant' (SUHG) and a pilot has commenced to look at alternative ways of administering SUHG. P cards are being used which enables the social worker or personal advisor to order online hence getting best value for money and saving time. Use of this method has shown a potential efficiency saving in this area of £6033.42 and more importantly saved 550 hours of work time per year. This potentially frees social workers and personal advisers up to have more time to do more valuable work, such as direct work with young people and budgeting as opposed to administrative tasks.
- Flows have been finalised for the current process of administering individual personal allowance payments to young people and a pilot has commenced involving two Social Workers to look at alternative payment methods. We are working towards removing cash payments and helping young people to have more financial responsibility reflective of the adult world for example by using alternative methods, such as payments into the bank. Using this method this has delivered a potential efficiency in this area of £66,563.64 and more importantly saving 4732 hours per year.

Considerations for the future:

- Young people could be given access to view their setting up home grant through an electronic system. This will then enable them to be involved in the process of understanding the purpose of the setting up home grant and be more aware in respect of financial management and sensible financial decision making
- The setting up home grant could be divided up so the young person can take complete control of part of the grant themselves with reviews on a regular basis with their social worker or personal adviser. This could assist young people in understanding the things they should consider before spending and the possible consequences of their choices which is important learning for adult life.

6. Involvement and information

- **That a web presence to support and provide guidance, including key contact numbers, for care leavers in Walsall be developed as a priority. The development of the website to be discussed and developed with care leavers to ensure that it meets their needs and expectations.**
- **That an update on the development of the Children in Care Council be reported to the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel within 6 months**

Progress:

Website:

Administrator training for the website has now been undertaken and the launch of the website is planned for the 29th April at My Place. A launch event has been organised in participation with the young people who helped develop the website. The website will be further developed in partnership with the young people and links to other social networking sites such as face book continue to be explored.

Children in Care Council:

TLC New Belongings (CICC for Care Leavers)

Since the report of the care leavers working group in October 2014 this group has developed from a New Belongings group into a Participation group called TLC New Belongings. They have a Chair, a Secretary and a Treasurer. Attendance is between 8 – 10 Care Leavers.

Council 4 Kids (CICC for Looked After Children)

C4K has continued as a stable, well structured group of young people and were involved in the planning and delivery of the Excellent Night Out in December.

Both Groups have been consulted about a range of issues including; Welcome Packs that are being created for 4 – 8 year olds becoming Looked After, Respect and Involvement, the Staying Put Policy and the production of a podcast for foster carer training. C4K has been consulted on the Aspire2Uni scheme being developed by the Virtual School and TLC New Belongings have been consulted about Pathway Plans, the living together agreement for staying put arrangements and are currently working on Common Scenario's and the Top Ten points of information for care leavers who are considering 'Staying Put'.

Members of the Corporate Parenting Board have visited the meetings including Paul Wicker (Leisure), Tony Griffin (Children's Services) and Balwant Bains (Head of the Virtual School). Members from both groups have been active as advocates on the sub groups for the implementation of the Looked After Children's Strategy. There

have been two events facilitated by A National Voice for Children in Care Council (CICC) nationally. Members of C4K and TLC New Belongings attended both events learning from other areas and sharing Walsall's good practice.

Future Developments

Two members of TLC New Belongings have requested to attend the Corporate Parenting Board on 1st April 2015 to find out what difference their voice is making and to update the Board on their progress.

The TLC New Belongings website will be launched on the 29 April and will be the vehicle to recruit new members. The New Belongings group has been involved in the development of a bid for the DfE's New Belongings 2 project and are hopeful that their bid will be successful

Both groups have asked to meet to discuss how they can work together more effectively to be the voice of Looked after Children and Care Leavers.

7. Corporate Parenting; Keeping in touch

- **That the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel receive a detailed report to consider the implementation of the new 18+ service provision arrangement, taking into account the impact on staffing arrangements, caseloads, budgets and impact on young people.**
- **That the findings of the Catch22 Corporate Parenting peer research be shared with the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel within 6 months**

Progress:

18 + Service Provision

Following on from the care leavers diagnostic undertaken by National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) in February 2014 consideration was given as to whether the 16+ model operated by the Corporate Parenting Service was the most efficient or effective model for Walsall's care leavers. Consultation was undertaken with young people, Independent Reviewing Officers and Social Workers who were of the view that moving to an 18+ service would have beneficial impact for young people as it would promote continuity of relationships and would support independence planning and professionals taking a longer term view of the child's journey. After undertaking this consultation and benchmarking with other Authorities, in September 2014 the Corporate Parenting service moved to an 18 + model of service delivery for its care leavers.

The transition to the new model has been successful with the immediate benefit for young people being that they transition to aftercare services at 18 years rather than at 16 years. This has ceased the need for young people to experience a change of social worker at 16, a key time in their lives, and has helped to promote a continued

consistent and meaningful relationship between the young person and their social worker.

Prior to transition staff indicated their three main areas of concern to be:

- access to professional development opportunities to enable them to take up new areas of work,
- practical arrangements (i.e. allocations, caseloads and team structures) and
- reviewing the finance systems for care leavers.

These areas have and continue to be addressed. Professional development and the development of a team ethos has been nurtured through some team building within the team, joint team meetings between social workers and personal advisers, joint reflective practice sessions and dedicated reflective sessions on individual cases. There has been access to joint training from NCAS and Care 2 Work both to support a collective understanding of the roles and responsibilities of social workers and personal advisers and to give an understanding of how to encourage more young people into education, employment and training.

Four developmental sessions were held with the Adults Complex team from which a joint working protocol was developed to support transition for young people. Multi-agency pathway plan training has been undertaken, facilitated by NCAS with the aim of gaining greater clarity in respect of pathway planning and to further strengthen supportive relationships for care leavers across the service and the partnership. In addition service away days in September 2014, December 2014 and March 2015 have been used as a mechanism to embed and consolidate changes with Social Workers and Personal Advisors alike.

As the transition process is gradual over a period of time no young person has experienced an interruption to their support with case allocations having been planned with no notable increase in caseload numbers. Having a stable workforce and permanent Team Manager oversight has enabled relationships within the team to be strengthened and become more coherent. The Team Manager for leaving care is charged with the oversight of services to all care leavers (16+) across the service which helps us to ensure a co-ordinated response to the provision of support and services for care leavers.

Joint supervision arrangements have been agreed and are in place. A Personal Adviser is ordinarily identified when a young person becomes 17 years. At this point a joint supervision is held between the Social Worker and the receiving Personal Adviser and roles, responsibilities and tasks agreed. A minimum of quarterly joint supervision takes place thereafter to ensure adequate management oversight and that joint working is having a beneficial impact on the young person. Until the young person reaches 18 years the social worker maintains the lead as the case holder.

In addition to the change to the model of delivery in the Corporate Parenting Service a wider Children's specialist services restructure, including a restructure to business support, has also taken place. This has strengthened the Care Leavers service

through the establishment of a Senior Personal Adviser role and the provision of dedicated administration support for the Care Leavers team.

Peer research

NCAS have advised that the peer research report will be published shortly and will include executive summaries of the findings. Arrangements will be made to alert Children's Scrutiny panel members and Corporate Parenting Board members of the findings once the report is available.

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