

13th January 2015

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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. The enclosed report details the progress against the recommendations of the working group. A further progress report will be made in April 2015

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: 13th January 2014

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

Purpose

To provide an 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. These recommendations have been listed under seven broad themes and progress 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:

Discussions have been held with Estates and Asset Management regarding the relocation of the Social Work and Transition and Leaving Care Service. Plans are currently being drafted to determine viable options for re-location, taking into consideration the needs of the young people and the service. The next opportunity for termination of the lease at Townend House is September 2015 with notice needing to be given in March 2015. Estates and Asset management are to present their findings to the Asset Review Group for a decision no later than February 2015. This will ensure there is adequate time for notice to be given, if a viable option for a move is identified.

Property Services are also carrying out a survey to establish what short term improvements can be made to the waiting area at Townend House. The Social Action Project Co-ordinator is undertaking a poster project with young people to ensure the area is decorated in a manner pleasing and appropriate for young people. New furniture is also being sourced. Our plan is that the area will be improved by the end of January 2015.

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:

The focus is to develop a specification for 'out of hours' provision which adequately reflects what the young people tell us that they need. A review of provision has commenced involving consultation with the young people in the New Belongings group and the Personal Advisors. The young people have identified that they would like us to develop 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. We have learnt that another Local Authority has established a service level agreement with the Samaritans in their area and contact will be made with this Authority in early January to understand how the arrangement operates. We also plan to look into local voluntary and charitable support schemes with commissioning colleagues to determine if there is scope to agree local arrangements. Discussions have also commenced between the Team Manager of the Leaving care Team and Julie Jones (Homelessness & Housing Service Manager) regarding the potential development of a volunteer scheme which would provide people who would act as mentor and be-friender to young people. This piece of work will commence in April 2015 once the Children's Services restructure has been implemented.

In terms of communication, a website has been developed and includes details of key contacts. It will be launched in the first quarter of 2015 following the completion of the required administrator training. As part of their work the New Belongings group are developing common scenarios which will be added to the website and also distributed in paper form by Personal Advisors as part of the pathway planning process. It is estimated that this will be in place by March 2015.

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:

Initial discussions have been held with the managers responsible for the fostering service, children's residential services and the Care Leavers team. The vision for independence needs to encompass all looked after children, not only those living with foster carers. This will ensure we have agreed expectations for all looked after children regardless of their placement type.

A kick start event to develop a joined up vision for independence, including 'staying put' in foster care and 'staying close' with residential care, is planned for 13th January 2015. This will include representatives from the Looked After and Leaving Care teams, Family Placements, foster carers and Residential Services. Once the model for independence has been agreed

across the service there will be a programme of briefings for residential workers, foster carers and social workers.

We currently have 10 young people in Staying Put arrangements. Children's Services policy is currently being reviewed to ensure compliance with regulations issued in May 2014 and best practice guidance. The commissioning team and family placements are working to ensure that we have the right support and agreements in place for both 'staying put' young people and their carers. The revised policy will be circulated to young people and carers for their comments in January 2015. The draft policy will also be made available to the Scrutiny Panel for their oversight and comment. Briefings will be arranged across the service once the policy has been confirmed as agreed.

The relevant reports identified in the recommendations will be provided to Scrutiny, as required, in April 2015.

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:

All young people that were affected by the changes to supported accommodation were successfully re-housed and support was provided appropriate to their needs. Loud Mouth Education are due to host a supported accommodation event early in 2015 to which the members of the working group will be invited.

Personal Advisors (PAs) check young people's accommodation during visits and briefings are to be provided to the PAs by Housing Standards to give a better understanding of key issues in relation to the law concerning standards of accommodation.

The current supported accommodation framework ends in November 2015. In conjunction with commissioners decisions are being made as to whether Walsall wants to remain part of the framework in future. A clear process has been developed for securing supported accommodation for young people and the commissioning team are currently working on the supported accommodation strategy. This will be available for consultation in January 2015.

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 are assisting with a review of the financial systems in the Care Leaver Service and have been helpful in undertaking some benchmarking with other Authorities. We are currently exploring the use of pre-paid cards which could give young people a greater degree of independence with their finances. The workflow is currently being mapped to determine both the costs and benefits of adopting the system. This work will be completed in January 2015 and an update provided in April 2015.

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:

The website is now in place and has been developed in conjunction with the New Belongings Group which comprises 11 young people at present. Administrator training is awaited and a launch will be planned during the first quarter of 2015. The website will continue to be further developed with the young people and links to other social networking sites such as face book are being explored.

An update report on the development of C4K and New Belongings will be presented to panel by April 2015.

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:

The Children's services restructure will be completed in April 2015. A report will be provided to the panel at that point to advise on the impact of the new arrangements and the findings of the peer research.

Author

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