

Children and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Agenda
Item No.

14th October, 2014

11.

Title of the Report: Care Leavers Working Group

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr B. Cassidy Cabinet Member (Children's Services)

Purpose

To receive the report of the Care Leavers Working Group established by the Children's Scrutiny and Performance Panel on 29 July, 2014.

Background

A working group was established by the Children's and Young People Panel to consider services in place for care leavers.

The Panel are asked to consider the final report attached as appendix 1 to this report and approve the recommendations as detailed on pages 25 & 26, and replicated below, for submission to Cabinet.

Recommendations

1. 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.
2. That every effort should be made to improve the environment which young people are expected to wait in at Townend House.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.

- 7. 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.**
- 8. That an update on the vision for independence be reported to the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel within the next six months.**
- 9. That further training be offered to foster carers to ensure that there is a consistent approach when preparing young people for independence; and;**
- 10. 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.**
- 11. 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.**
- 12. 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.**
- 13. That the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel be consulted on the strategy for Supported Accommodation once developed.**
- 14. 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.**
- 15. 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.**
- 16. 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.**
- 17. 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.**
- 18. That the findings of the Catch22 Corporate Parenting peer research be shared with the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel within 6 months.**
- 19. 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.**

20. 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.

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Care Leavers Working Group



To be presented to Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel on 14 October, 2014



Walsall Council

A message from the Lead Member

Do we really understand what is it like to be a care leaver in Walsall? As Members and as Corporate Parents, are we confident that the services we deliver are the best possible within the budget available? Would we be happy for our own children to live in accommodation in which we place care leavers? Do our care leavers receive the support they need to become independent?

These are just a few of the questions that, as Members, we need to be confident in answering. We have a responsibility to learn not just from officers but the young people themselves, the young people that the policies and procedures we introduce as an authority impact upon.

This investigation has been eye opening and would not have been possible without the valuable contribution of the young people who took the time to meet with Members and literally 'open their doors' to show us around their homes.

I would personally like to thank all of the young people that made this review possible. As elected Members we now have a much better understanding of the issues faced by care leavers and will do our best to improve services on your behalf – without you and your input this would not have been possible.



Councillor E. Hughes

**Lead Member, Looked After Children
Working group**

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Introduction

The Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel (the Panel) identified the opportunity to investigate services for 'Care Leavers' at its meeting on 29 July, 2014.

To complete this task a small working group was established.

Terms of Reference

Draft terms of reference were discussed and agreed by the Panel that took place on 29 July, 2014.

The full version of the Working Groups terms of reference can be found at Appendix 1 to this report.

The Working Group was supported predominantly by three Officers:

Sue Butcher	Interim Assistant Director (Specialist Services)
Sharron Sandell	Team Manager – Transition and Leaving Care Service
Neil Picken	Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager

Membership

The working group was made up of the following Councillors:



Councillor E. Hughes
Lead Member



Councillor T. Jukes



Councillor E. Hazell



Councillor R. Martin

How did we look at the Transition and Leaving Care Service?

Members met with a number of care leavers to truly understand and learn about the processes in place and the impact they have on their day to day lives. They visited young people in their homes and held meetings with officers and the Social Action Project Worker to ensure they received an overview of the entire service.

Who helped us along the way?

The Working Group met and discussed issues or received evidence relating to looked after children with the following witnesses:

Young people	Care Leavers
Kimberley Hull	Social Action Project Worker
Sue Butcher	Interim Assistant Director (Specialist Services) (Has now left the Authority)
Sharron Sandell	Team Manager – Transition and Leaving Care Service
Pal Kaur	Personal Advisor
Sarah Donaldson	Personal Advisor
Joy Summers	Personal Advisor
Anne Foy	Personal Advisor
Raj Kaur	Personal Advisor
Lisa Footit	Personal Advisor

How is the report set out?

The report sets out the working groups findings along with supporting evidence. The report does not seek to analyse in depth every aspect of the Leaving Care Service but does attempt to identify and make recommendations that will assist young care leavers in Walsall.

Context

The big picture - an overview of Transition and Leaving Care Services

The Transition and Leaving Care service in Walsall has seen significant challenges during recent years. These have included changes to the team and senior managers together with new requirements introduced by the Experience and Progress of Care Leavers element of the Children's Services Inspection Framework.

As of 17th June, 2014 the service was supporting 239 Care Leavers between the ages of 16 – 25. Of these 80 were between 16 -18 and 159 were 18 or over. The majority, but not all, care leavers remain in Walsall. For those that move out of the Borough, the Council still has a duty to provide the same level of care and support. There are 4, 16/17 year olds living out of borough and 76 aged 18 or over.

In terms of finance, the 2014-15 Main Stream controllable budget (**excluding** non controllable budgets such as CSS charges) is £1,110,511. The 2014-15 Additional Grant expenditure budget due (not yet allocated to TLC): £48,321 and the 2014-15 Grant Income budget (not yet allocated to TLC) is -£48,321. This relates to the new Staying Put Grant which had not been allocated at the time of drafting this report.

Just another report? Not Quite.

This report focuses, unapologetically, on the views of young people that are care leavers. Their thoughts and feelings about how services are provided, both good and bad are key to understanding how we as Corporate Parents are performing. It is acknowledged that much of the report is based on feedback received than hard facts but it is equally, if not more important to remember that these are 'the voices' of the young people for which all Members, collectively, have responsibility to care for. These voices need to be heard in order for services to be shaped around those individuals to which it matters most.

A quick thank you

The Working Group was fortunate as a number of young people gave up their time to discuss their experiences of life both in care and as care leavers. They also allowed Members to visit them in their homes to show them what life was like in supported accommodation.

The insight that this gave was incredibly powerful and every Member appreciated the time young people gave to help them understand the service and life for care leavers.

Themes

As a result of the discussions with both officers and young people, a number of key themes emerged which are addressed within the report:-

- Support (including preparation for leaving care);
- Accommodation/security;
- Finance;
- Education.

Support

What happens when a young person leaves care?

When a young person leaves care they are legally entitled to support from the local authority as a care leaver. This is necessary as they will be expected to do more on their own and so support and guidance is necessary in order for them to make a successful transition to adulthood.

There are ten key elements which care leavers are legally entitled to:-

- An assessment of their needs
- A Pathway Plan
- A Personal Advisor
- A Place to Live
- Financial Support
- Help to maintain relationships
- Be involved in decisions
- Be made aware that they can complain (and use an advocate) to do so.
- To view their files
- To be informed about all the services which they are entitled to.

Great sources of information can be found from Shelter and Catch22:-

<http://www.catch-22.org.uk/>

http://youngpeopleoutcomes.shelter.org.uk/advice_for_advisers_of_young_people/when_young_people_have_to_move_out/care_leavers

What does Walsall Council do to support Care Leavers?

It is important to recognise that, up to the point of leaving care, young people have a much wider support system in place catering for a variety of needs. They are supported by a range of professionals and partners. This is greatly reduced at the point at which they become care leavers which means that those that are involved are crucially important to young care leavers.

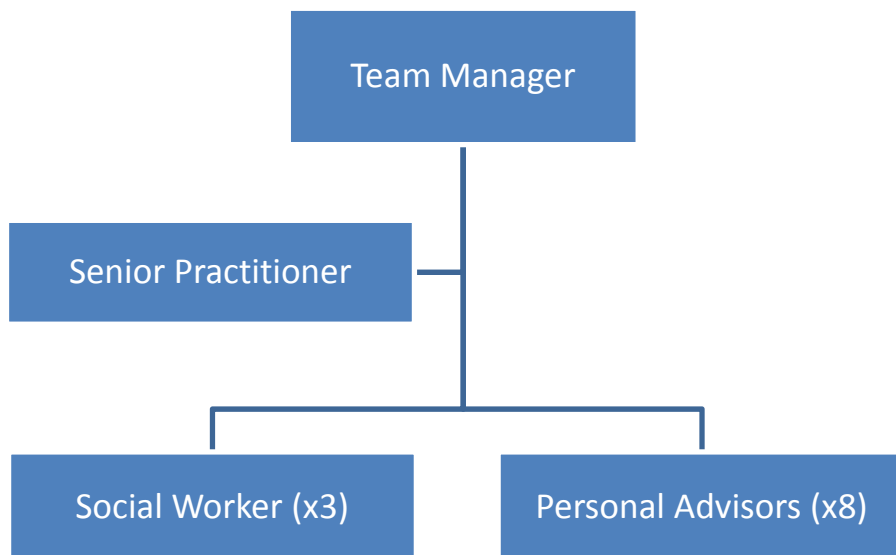
Service Model

The current service model for care leavers is 16+. However, this has been reviewed and the preferred service model going forward is for young people to transition to aftercare services at 18 years, rather than 16 years. It is anticipated that this model would prevent the need for a change in social worker at 16 and will help to promote a continued, consistent and meaningful relationship between the young person and their social worker to the age of 18.

Members of the Working Group support changes which maintain consistency of care for young people.

Members were pleased to see that Social Workers and the Transition and Leaving Care Service worked together in one location as this encouraged open communication and sharing of working practices. This was highlighted as a positive by staff which the working group spoke with.

The Council has a Transition and Leaving Care Service (TLC), based at Townend House. The service supports care leavers through their transition to adulthood. The team structure is as follows:-



Members of the working group met with all staff within the structure and noted that the workforce was much more stable than in previous years. This had enabled relationships within the team to be developed and become more cohesive. ***Members are assured that the team are committed to providing an effective service and supported the initiatives in place to develop individuals and the team as a whole.***

The role of Personal Advisors

Every Care Leaver is allocated a **personal adviser** who keeps in touch with them providing support and guidance to help them achieve the things set out in their pathway plan. The **pathway plan** is a document which identifies each young person's needs and how the local authority will help young people meet these. This can include financial assistance especially with education, employment and training.

The personal advisor coordinates services and provides both emotional and practical support. The service is provided to young people up to the age of 21, unless they are in education, which then enables support to be continued to the age of 25. Practical examples of support include assisting young people with making benefit claims, accompanying them to jobcentre appointments and providing help completing forms.

Members consistently witnessed and heard examples from young people about personal advisors passion and commitment, often going 'above and beyond' to provide the support required. The role of personal advisors was clearly valued by young people in what is a crucial support role. A good initiative was that personal advisors attended the job centre as 'job seekers' to learn and understand the processes first hand in order to understand the system they were helping young people to navigate.

Members noted that a new IT caseload management system was being introduced which should enable better information sharing in terms of Pathway Plans between social workers and personal advisors.

Location of the Transition and Leaving Care Service

The TLC is based in Walsall Town Centre at Townend House. Members visited the building and it was clear that the environment, particularly the lobby area, could be improved. Many young people are asked to attend Townend House to collect their allowance. The space was cramped and uninspiring which, due to its size, was a pressure cooker for anti-social behaviour and disruption.

The Working Group felt that every effort should be made to improve the environment which young people are expected to wait in. The dull, uninspiring space does little to encourage positivity. This needs to be addressed involving care leavers in its design and redecoration so that it is a space which they own and value. The matter should also be considered as part of the Smarter Workplace Strategy to consider whether Townend House is the most appropriate location for the social work and TLC teams in the medium to long term.

Recommendations:-

- 1. 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.**
- 2. That every effort should be made to improve the environment which young people are expected to wait in at Townend House.**
- 3. 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.**

What did young people tell us about the Transition and Leaving Care Service and the support they receive to become independent?

Many young people explained that the transition to independence was difficult, both emotionally and in terms of practical day to day functions such as shopping/cooking and using various appliances etc.

It was clear that care leavers valued the work of the personal advisor and relied on them for help, support and guidance. It became apparent from the outset that personal advisors were a key and vital contact for care leavers. They were well thought of and appreciated as a source of support both practically and emotionally.

Whilst not directed at the support from individual advisors, there were a few areas of service provision which young people challenged:-

Out of hours support

Personal Advisors are contracted to work Monday to Friday 9 – 5 whereas young people would like/need someone to provide help and support outside of these hours – much in the way that a young person would rely upon their parents.

A number of young people explained that support 'out of hours' was not sufficient for their needs. When a discussion took place regarding the emergency telephone system, young care leavers explained ***"it's a waste of time..."*** and ***"I hadn't even heard of it"***.

Members noted that some young people remain in contact with their foster carers after leaving care however, this was not consistent. It was also reported by some young people that they were not aware that it was okay to maintain that relationship. Given that this could be a valuable point of contact both in and out of hours - Members suggest that the information supplied to Care Leavers be revisited to clearly set out what is acceptable. It is also suggested that officers consider whether more could be done to encourage continued support by foster carers after the child has left care either in an informal or formal basis.

In terms of what to do in situations that arise out of hours, members suggest that a list of common scenarios 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. It is further suggested that an online information page be developed and implemented, as detailed in the section 'what about websites?'

Recommendations:-

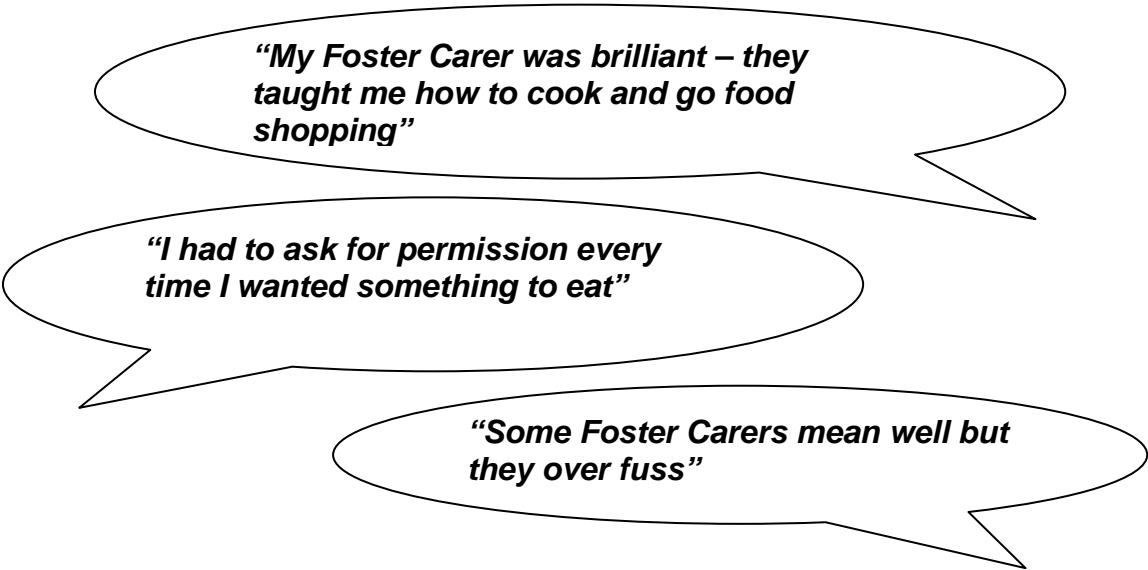
- 4. That the availability of 'out of hours' provision be communicated to all care leavers to ensure that all care leavers are aware of the support in place;**

5. 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.
6. That a review of out of hours provision take place and be reported to the Children's Scrutiny Panel detailing the outcome of the review within the next three months.
7. 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 formal basis.

Preparing for Independence/leaving Care

Young people repeatedly explained that they did not feel ready for independence, particularly when moving out alone as it was lonely and difficult to manage their finances.

From feedback received it was clear that the quality of preparation whilst in foster care varied greatly:-



"My Foster Carer was brilliant – they taught me how to cook and go food shopping"

"I had to ask for permission every time I wanted something to eat"

"Some Foster Carers mean well but they over fuss"

Members of the working group understand, recognise and value the important role that Foster Carers bring. They also appreciate the positive influence and impact that foster carers can have on a young person's life. It is also clear that the role of a Foster Carer can, at times, be challenging. That said, it is critical that all young people in foster care receive the same level of support and guidance to prepare them to become independent. There needs to be consistency across all Foster Carers to ensure that every care leaver is afforded the same opportunity to prepare them for independence.

Members were pleased to hear that for those in a semi-independent programme in residential home, the key worker would accompany them to go food shopping to prepare them for independence.

The Working Group was also pleased to learn that a vision for independence was being developed for adoption across all services.

Recommendations:-

- 8. That an update on the vision for independence be reported to the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel within the next six months.**
- 9. That further training be offered to foster carers to ensure that there is a consistent approach when preparing young people for independence; and;**
- 10. That an update on the take up of training be submitted the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel detailing alternative provision within the next six months.**

Accommodation

The law is clear that the Council has to ensure that care leavers have a 'suitable place to live'. This means that it should be right for the young person and, importantly, safe.

In providing accommodation for young care leavers, the regulations and guidance stipulate that local authorities should:

- avoid moving and disrupting young people who are settled;
- assess young people's needs and prepare them for any move;
- offer a choice of accommodation (where practicable);
- provide a support package to go with the accommodation;
- have a contingency plan in case accommodation arrangements break down.

In Walsall, the following accommodation is available for Care Leavers aged 16/17:-

- Bed and Breakfast (this is used very rarely and only when absolutely necessary and is soon to be abolished);
- Returning to the family home;
- Foster care – 'Staying Put';
- Supported lodgings with other friends or family;
- Supported accommodation schemes, including foyers.

From the age of 18 some of the options listed above will be available to young people long-term, and some young people will choose to stay in their supported lodgings scheme rather than move to different accommodation.

However, many will move-on to the next stage of housing options.

At this stage, a young person may;

- return to their birth family.
- Enter the private renting sector;
- Enter Social Housing;

Foster care - Staying Put

Walsall has recently developed a core 'Staying Put' policy for those post-18 to make sure that young people are able to stay living with their foster carers under 'staying put' arrangements.

Members were informed that there was a drive to increase the number of young people 'Staying Put'. Young people who have been in the same foster placement since the age of 15 may choose to continue to live with their foster family. Foster care payments would cease, however, an alternative financial arrangement would be made, with former foster parents becoming supported

lodgings providers. In some local authorities, 'Staying Put' carers receive much lower payments than they did as foster carers. The 'provider' would then play a role in the young person's pathway plan, and help prepare a young person for their transition into more independent accommodation.

Members recognise that more work is required in terms of raising the profile of 'staying put' as it is not yet being widely used. It was clear that financial matters would create tension in circumstances where foster carers were reliant on that income. It is important to recognise that there is existing pressure on the availability of Foster Carers in Walsall which could be impacted upon should 'Staying Put' arrangements become more popular.

Recommendation:

- 11. 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.**

Supported Accommodation - What's changing?

Walsall is part of a Regional Framework for the provision of Supported Accommodation which is led by Staffordshire County Council. This framework was established two years ago and is managed through a regional network meeting. The purpose of the framework is to specify tiers of supported accommodation provision across the region. The Framework has been extended for one year while it is re-tendered and a new arrangement put in place from December, 2015.

In addition to the above, the Councils Money, Home, Job Team have reviewed their current supported accommodation provision as the contract ended on 30th September, 2014. The revised specification changes the way that the support element of the service is delivered by providing this in house with tenancy support being provided by the housing organisations. A strategy is being developed for Supported Accommodation for Care Leavers.

Recommendations:-

- 12. 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;**
- 13. That the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel be consulted on the strategy for Supported Accommodation once developed;**

What did Members think of the accommodation they visited?

Members witnessed first-hand the poor state of some of the existing supported accommodation. They have concerns regarding the quality and availability of the accommodation available to care leavers.

Supported accommodation was of particular concern. On one visit a security door, a key part of ensuring young people feel safe, was ineffective and could simply be pulled open.

Further investigations and discussions into accommodation highlighted that:-

- There was inconsistency with the quality and availability of support staff within supported accommodation;
- Supported accommodation was often in undesirable areas;
- Supported accommodation itself was in poor repair which did little to raise the aspirations of young people. Carpets were torn, walls had holes and simple items – such as blinds or curtains were not provided;
- When young people choose to move into WHG properties it is a bare room with no carpets, curtains or furnishings which puts pressure on the £2k leaving care grant.

What did young people tell us about their accommodation?

A number of young people explained that the locations of supported accommodation were not ideal. Quite often they were in undesirable locations which made it difficult to keep out of trouble and at times made them feel vulnerable.:-



"I felt vulnerable at the location I was put in"

It was also explained that choice was limited:-



"I was told I was going to STREAMS"

Members were satisfied that every effort was made to find alternative accommodation in line with the young persons' wishes, wherever practically possible. The difficulty is that the accommodation available is currently poor.

Many young people explained that within many facilities there were a number of disruptive individuals that made 'keeping out of trouble' difficult. At certain locations a police presence was a constant occurrence due to disruption at the premises.

Most concerning was that one youngster advised a Member that he was aware that he needed to leave his current accommodation, in which he felt settled, within four weeks as the contract with the Council and the supplier was coming to an end. With only four weeks to go he was yet to be informed about where he would be moved to.

Members acknowledge that there is a review of supported accommodation underway but are disappointed to hear that this young person was not aware of where they would be moving to. One of the key messages of the Children's Act is that young people are consulted with and kept informed. Further, it is important to reduce the number of significant changes to young people with an emphasis on settling in to help stability.

Recommendations:-

- 14. That a full report, detailing the number of young people affected by the changes to supported accommodation, together with confirmation that they have been re-accommodated, be considered by the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel within three months;**
- 15. That all existing supported accommodation be spot checked to ensure that all matters relating to security and basic furnishings are in working order and effective with an update of findings to be considered by the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel within three months.**

Finance

What about money?

Children's services are responsible for accommodation and maintenance costs for 16 and 17 year old care leavers (who choose to remain in contact with their local authority - this will not be the case for all young care leavers). Except in exceptional circumstances, it will be expected that a 16 or 17 year old care leaver will retain control over their personal allowance.

16 and 17 year old care leavers living in a supported or semi/independent setting receive a weekly allowance. This is equivalent to benefits rates for other young people. This allowance will continue to be paid regardless of any other income the young person has, such as a further education grant, training allowance or wages from employment.

If young people live in supported accommodation, where their utilities and some food are provided, deductions will be made to cover these costs.

At the age of 18 young people are supported by their Personal Advisors to claim benefits which they are entitled to. They are also supported in gaining employment through initiatives such as 'Job Club' which takes place at the Goldmine Centre.

What young people told us about managing money.

Members were told that the application process for Job Seekers Allowance was difficult and confusing. With all benefits there were various penalties implemented for a variety of issues which can make it very difficult financially. Care leavers over the age of 18 are entitled to income support and housing benefit if they are studying non-advanced education i.e. (below degree level). In order to be eligible young people have to be enrolled/accepted onto a course before they 19th birthday and can only claim until they turn 21.

Members recognise that there are significant challenges in relation to claiming benefits and the penalties imposed. At a local level every effort should be made to ensure better co-operation between job centre staff and care leavers. At a national level, it is suggested that this report be sent to the minister responsible for children and families in the Department for Education, Edward Timpson MP to highlight the difficulties faced and ask whether more could be done to support care leavers to become independent and overcome the barriers they face.

Setting up home grant

In Walsall, an allowance of £2000 is payable to all care leavers up to the age of 21 to help towards the cost of setting up home to cover, for example, a television license, contents insurance, sofas, white goods and other furniture. This is managed by the Transition and Leaving Care Service.

The Working Group found during discussion with a number of care leavers that many young people were not aware of how much money they had already spent. They were also unaware of the balance remaining. Given the importance of encouraging and supporting young people to become independent financially Members:-

Recommended:-

- 16. 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.**

|

Education

The working group established that there were strong links with Walsall College and that every effort was made to support care leavers to continue their education by their personal advisors.

This became problematic for care leavers reaching the age of 21 if they were claiming job seekers allowance as they needed to prove they were spending 35 hours a week looking for work. This meant they were unable to enter education as they would lose all income – a stark choice.

The accommodation provided to young people is crucial in ensuring that they are able to study in a good environment. As discussed earlier in the report, the condition, location and bad influences in current provision does little to assist those individuals which clearly want to pursue their education.

| Travel costs could also be a barrier to young people's education. There is no direct funding available for travel allowances in the present system.

How does the service listen to Young People?

New Belongings

The 'New Belongings' project - run by the Care Leavers' Foundation and funded by the Department for Education - aims to create the gold standard in supporting care leavers.

Small expert teams have worked intensively with the council, care leavers and along with other service providers and the local community - to improve how care leavers are supported.

Members were pleased to hear that the New Belongings Group would be developed to become a Children in Care Council, specifically for care leavers.

Children in Care Council

Members discovered that work was being undertaken to develop a mechanism for the structured engagement of care leavers which would enable children in care to provide feedback on service delivery and development.

Recommendation:

- 17. 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.**

Council4Kids

The Working Group were informed that Council 4 Kids met on a regular basis and that efforts were being made to strengthen and support Council 4 Kids.

Catch22 Corporate Parenting peer research project

The Council has been one of 12 local authorities participating in the Catch22 Corporate Parenting peer research project. This involved a number of young people who were interviewed over three years 2011 to 2013 and asked about their relationship with the Council. The results of this research was expected in Autumn 2014.

Recommendation:

- 18. That the findings of the Catch22 Corporate Parenting peer research project be shared with the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel within 6 months.**

What about websites?

Members of the working group were unable to find a web presence which provided advice and guidance for care leavers in Walsall. This is not acceptable given that it would be a useful resource for young care leavers and accessible at all times of the day and night.

As raised earlier in the report, out of hours provision needs to be strengthened. Having an informative web presence would certainly help to direct our care leavers to the right place and person in times of concern. The website should include example scenarios common for care leavers together with details of who to contact in each situation. An example of the scenarios raised by young people Members met included:-

- I have no money and no electric;
- There is a mouse in the flat;
- The toilet is broken;
- Other residents are trying to get into my flat;
- The building is noisy and I'm frightened;
- I have an appointment but how do I get there?
- I'm feeling lonely;
- How do I cook?
- How and where do I go shopping?
- I feel ill, what doctor can I see?

Recommendation:-

- 19. 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.**

Conclusion

The Working Group found throughout their investigations that there is a clear drive to support care leavers in Walsall to achieve their goals. Good practice in terms of links with education, the New Belongings Project and a strong service through the Transition and Leaving Care service should be recognised.

That said, there is clearly more work required to ensure that the service provides not just suitable, but a good level of accommodation which ensures that our young people feel safe and secure. There is also the need to revisit the type of support we offer once the office day ends as, quite often, this is the time that our young people need someone to speak to.

It is accepted that finances, not just for children's services but the council as a whole are becoming increasingly stretched, however, the authority and its members have a duty to ensure that provision for care leavers in Walsall is the best it can be with the resources we have available to ensure they are safe and supported to succeed.

Recommendations

That:

1. 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.
2. That every effort should be made to improve the environment which young people are expected to wait in at Townend House.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. That an update on the vision for independence be reported to the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel within the next six months.
9. That further training be offered to foster carers to ensure that there is a consistent approach when preparing young people for independence; and;
10. 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.
11. 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.

- 12. 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.**
- 13. That the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel be consulted on the strategy for Supported Accommodation once developed.**
- 14. 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.**
- 15. 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.**
- 16. 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.**
- 17. 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.**
- 18. That the findings of the Catch22 Corporate Parenting peer research be shared with the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel within 6 months.**
- 19. 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.**
- 20. 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.**

Appendix 1

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Work Group Name:	Care Leavers Working Group
Panel:	Children's and Young Peoples
Municipal Year:	2014/15
Lead Member:	Councillor E. Hughes
Lead Officer:	Sue Butcher
Scrutiny Officer:	Neil Picken
Membership:	Councillor T. Jukes Councillor R. Martin Councillor E. Hazell

1. Context	
	<p>It is important that Members of the Children's and Young People Scrutiny Panel take the time to consider all matters within the remit of the Panel as this developed understanding leads to effective and improved Scrutiny.</p> <p>It is not possible to consider every aspect at Panel meetings and so it is suggested that short term working groups be established (no more than one at any given time) and tasked with considering a number of topics in-depth.</p> <p>This new, more focussed approach to working groups will enable Members to quickly drill down into a specific area, increasing knowledge and enabling them to carry out their roles as critical friends to challenge and improve services.</p> <p>Leaving care is an important time in young people's lives and it is essential that, as a Council, the support, encouragement and services put in place do everything possible to ensure that every care leaver achieves the best possible outcomes.</p> <p>Members of the Panel are afforded the opportunity, via this working group, to meet with young people and 'see' services first hand before reporting back their findings to the Scrutiny Panel in September, 2014.</p>
2. Objectives	
	<p>For Members to:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop an understanding of the journey for care leavers;• Improve knowledge of the services and support available to care leavers to support their transition to adulthood;• Establish what pressures face services in light of diminishing budgets and understand what impact this may have for future service delivery;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek assurance that services are effective and efficient delivering the best outcome for young people, particularly in relation to the:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reshaping of the children in care service to better reflect the child and young person's journey and reduce transitions and changes of social worker • Implementation of a West Midlands Supported Housing Framework contract • Focus on Pathway Plans • Identify potential areas for improvement;
3.	Scope
	<p>Members to:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit and spend time with staff delivering services to care leavers to develop an operational understanding of the service; • Speak directly to care leavers to establish their view on existing service provision; • Meet with senior officers to establish and understand strategies in place to support and improve services for care leavers; • Understand and consider the budget available for delivery of services and consider any potential impact budget reductions could have; • To request information as necessary to better understand the legal framework, key processes, governance arrangements and policies and procedures in place • To consider areas for improvement; • To review all information gathered both quantitative and qualitative to make recommendations for improvement where necessary.
4.	Equalities Implications
	<p>When considering each area Members will consider whether each area adequately delivers towards the six strands of equalities, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Disability • Gender • Race • Religion or belief • Sexual orientation
5.	Who else will you want to take part?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and Young Peoples Staff • Care Leavers

6.	Timescales & Reporting Schedule														
	<p>To report to the Children’s & Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel on:</p> <p>Terms of reference – 29.07.14</p> <p>Final report – 9 September, 2014</p> <p>To report to – Cabinet - 22 October, 2014</p>														
7.	Risk factors														
	<table><tr><th>Risk</th><th>Likelihood</th><th>Measure to Resolve</th></tr><tr><td>Difficulties engaging with teams</td><td>Medium</td><td>Engage with teams early to make necessary arrangements</td></tr><tr><td>Completing all work in a timely manner</td><td>High</td><td>Advance schedule of meetings arranged. Consider interim report if necessary.</td></tr><tr><td>Possible transition of senior management during review</td><td>Medium</td><td>Open discussion with senior managers to ensure consistency of review.</td></tr></table>			Risk	Likelihood	Measure to Resolve	Difficulties engaging with teams	Medium	Engage with teams early to make necessary arrangements	Completing all work in a timely manner	High	Advance schedule of meetings arranged. Consider interim report if necessary.	Possible transition of senior management during review	Medium	Open discussion with senior managers to ensure consistency of review.
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Possible transition of senior management during review	Medium	Open discussion with senior managers to ensure consistency of review.													

Date Agreed:	29.07.14	Date Updated:	
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Timetable: TBA subject to Members availability

DATE	ACTIVITY
w/c 4 Aug, 2014	Members to meet with senior management to receive an overview of services and budget arrangements/pressures.
w/c 11 Aug, 2014	Members to meet with frontline staff and service users
w/c 18 Aug, 2014	Members to draw together findings and draft final report
9 Sept, 2014	Final Report to Scrutiny Panel