

Report to: Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 23 November 2015

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: Services to care leavers – Action Plan update

Purpose: To update members on progress for services to care leavers following the Ofsted inspection judgement of 'Requires Improvement' in the inspection of February 2014.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) The Committee is asked to note the progress that has been made in key areas within services to care leavers
 - 2) The Committee is also asked to note the ongoing challenges in providing sufficient suitable accommodation options and the likelihood that this position will deteriorate still further given the financial position of the Council.
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1 Background

1.1 Although overall Children's Services were judged by Ofsted to be 'Good' with an 'Outstanding' sub-judgement for Adoption following the inspection in February 2014, the sub-judgement for services to care leavers was 'Requires Improvement'. Consequently an Action Plan was developed to respond and an update on progress is attached as Appendix 1.

2. Supporting information

2.1 Since the inspection, the service has benefited from being consolidated into one office base and from strengthened management. At the end of 2014/15, the service was working with a cohort of 209 care leavers; 56 of whom were 16 - 17 year olds and 153 of whom were 18 - 24 year olds. A significant proportion (about 30%) of this cohort, are highly complex young people presenting with a range of challenging behaviours and consequent safeguarding issues.

2.2 Following the feedback from Ofsted, significant attention has been focused on the key areas identified by the inspection team namely: quality of overall planning, education and employment, accommodation and teaching independence/life skills.

2.2.1 Quality of overall planning

A revised Pathway Plan and Risk Assessment tool is now in place and a bespoke training offer has been developed to provide specialist knowledge and expertise to all staff working with this client group.

The service has a process for storing all valuable documents and care leavers now have all key documents available to them. A review of entitlements has taken place and the revised offer has been uploaded onto a website to ensure the greatest level of availability/access to young people.

2.2.2 Education

As of 31st March 2015 80% of 16 – 17 year olds (year 12) were in education, training and employment (EET); 69% of 17 - 18 year olds (year 13) were EET. This cohort included care leavers who have significant learning disabilities and who are managed within the Transition Service, and were in continuous care for at least 12 months before sitting their GCSE

examinations. Of 155 eligible care leavers, 14% (22) were at University. A greater level of detail on educational attainment is provided in Appendix 2.

2.2.3 Employment

The Care2Work strategic multi agency board has implemented a range of developments designed to improve the skills of care leavers and to ensure a successful transition into education and employment. It has also continued to track and monitor the education and training of all care leavers. Similarly, the board has raised the profile of Looked After Children (LAC) and care leavers within the wider Council. As a result colleagues within Personnel and Training delivered a number of bespoke employability workshops to assist care leavers to be ready for work, and to support them to apply for in-house work experience and apprenticeship opportunities. The Council Plan for 2014/15 incorporated specific targets for each department to identify apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers. The Virtual School set up a Service Level Agreement with the Universities of Brighton and Sussex to raise awareness and aspiration for ESCC LAC and care leavers. In addition a 16+ caseworker was employed specifically to work alongside the Care Leavers Service and external providers to support students with training and employment opportunities. Links with seconded staff from the Department of Work and Pensions who are co-located in the Targeted Youth Support Service have been strengthened.

2.2.4 Accommodation

Disappointingly the number and range of accommodation options for care leavers remained broadly static during 2014/15. Building on existing practice, particular emphasis was placed on encouraging care leavers to remain with their carers in "Staying Put" arrangements, either in foster care or in Supported Lodgings. Supporting People providers continued to offer a range of Foyer type accommodation across the county – Newhaven, Eastbourne, Hastings and Hailsham. The partnership between the Care Leavers Service and YMCA Eastbourne has delivered a fully renovated and refurbished 3 bedroom flat which is staffed at evenings and weekends. However providing sufficient accommodation for the most chaotic and challenging young people continues to be problematic and on the 30th March 2015 there were 6 care leavers in total living in B&B accommodation, 3 were aged 16 - 17 and 3 were over 18. Clearly this type of accommodation is unsuitable for any vulnerable young person and particularly so for those with a care background. There are no 'approved' B&B providers in the county, although the service has developed relationships with some providers who will offer additional support and oversight. This option is only used in emergency situations where the young person has completely exhausted all alternatives and to avoid street homelessness. Any decision to place a young person in B&B accommodation must be authorised by an Assistant Director and be accompanied by a clear risk assessment. A wrap around package of support is identified and reviewed regularly whilst suitable alternative accommodation is sought. Most young people are only in B&B for short periods. The Assistant Director is reporting to the Director about B&B use on a regular basis. The funding reductions currently being modelled by Supporting People will reduce further already scarce supported housing options for young people and will increase use of B&B for care leavers. This will result in additional and significant pressure across the whole county but particularly in Hastings where there is already a lack of suitable provision.

2.2.5 Teaching independence/life skills

Building on what was already in place, independence training will continue to be offered to young people where they live and core training to foster carers and supported lodgings

providers is delivered by staff from the service. The children's group homes continue to work with young people to develop independence skills.

Personal advisers use Targeted Youth Support facilities across the county to deliver independence skills training. Group work on developing life skills has been accredited by AQA and is being delivered either to small groups or individually as appropriate.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 Significant progress has been made since the Ofsted inspection in all of the key areas identified apart from increased accommodation options for care leavers. Given the challenging financial position of the Council it will not be possible to develop alternative supported housing options and current supported housing stock is likely to reduce even further. This will inevitably result in increased risk for care leavers and in reputational risk for the Council.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Action Plan

Appendix 2 - Educational Attainment

LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None