

BRIEFING PAPER

SUBJECT: Outcomes for Care Leavers
DATE: 22nd October 2015
RECIPIENT: Children and Families Scrutiny Panel

BRIEFING DETAILS:

1. This report provides an update in relation to the core outcomes for young people within the current cohort of care leavers in Southampton.

Background and National Context

2. The term 'care leaver' refers to a Looked after Child/young person aged 16+ who is transitioning from childhood into adulthood. Every year around 10,000 16 to 18 year-olds leave foster or residential care in England.
3. In 2013-14, 10,310 young people aged over 16 left care, an increase of almost 50% since 2003-04. This increase is due to an increase in the care population as a whole; an increase in the number of older children coming into care; and 16 and 17 year-olds presenting as homeless and becoming looked-after. At the end of March 2014, 1 in 75 of all 19-year-olds was a care leaver.
4. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 introduced strengthened requirements on local authorities to plan for looked after children so that they have the support they need as they make their transition to the responsibilities of adulthood.
5. Children in care must leave local authority care by their 18th birthday. Local authorities have a statutory obligation to support care leavers until they are 21 years old (or 25 if they are in education or training). On leaving care, some young people return home to their families but many start to live independent lives.
6. A child/young person may have become looked after (i) because of temporary or permanent problems facing their parents, (ii) as a result of abuse or neglect, (iii) because of challenging behaviour or (iv) because they have no-one to care for them. Looked after children and care leavers face a variety of unique challenges as they grow up and transition into adulthood. For example, they are at greater risk of experiencing social exclusion because moving away from the family home can often break social networks, which in turn can induce strong feelings of loss and separation.

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Southampton Current Context

7. As of October 2015 there are 247 young people allocated within the Southampton Children's Services Pathways Team. Of these, 108 are children under 18 years of age who are looked after and 139 are over 18 year old care leavers.
8. Each child or young person has a social worker or personal advisor allocated to them to support them and develop and implement individual care/pathway plans. Social worker caseloads across the service area (Pathways) are currently approximately 20 individual young people per full time practitioner.
9. The Pathway Plan and the needs assessment is reviewed by a statutory review chaired by the young person's IRO within 3 months of their 16th birthday and thereafter every 6 months or sooner if required. The partnership working between social worker, family members, carers, Virtual School, designated LAC nurse, and other relevant professionals is vital if actions and outcomes are to be achieved.
10. The key focus of work with the care leaver cohort cover the following areas:
 - Clear and regular transitional planning
 - Emotional and physical health and development
 - Education, training and employment
 - Identity support
 - Work on family and social relationships
 - Practical skills necessary for independent living
 - Financial arrangements
 - Suitability of accommodation

Accommodation

11. The city has developed a strategic approach to finding and accessing suitable accommodation for young care leavers and a wide range of options are available including a "staying put" offer for care leavers to continue to reside with their current foster carer(s). Steps have been taken to improve the joint working between the Care Leavers/Pathways Team and the Housing Needs Team. This will ensure the most appropriate housing and support is identified as part of the young person's Pathway Plan, including access to a secure tenancy with SCC or one of our Housing providers, if that is the most appropriate accommodation for the young person. A formal agreement, or joint protocol, between the relevant agencies to ensure all partners understand their roles and engage in effective joint working, which will lead to better outcomes for young people. The protocols will set out the arrangements to ensure young people experience a planned and supported transition to independent living, and importantly, includes a shared commitment by agencies to adopt a 'corporate parenting' approach for care leavers.

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12. Other improvements include 5 accommodation units at Defender Rd dedicated to care leavers. This provision has been consistently occupied and young people have successfully moved on from them to either privately rented or SCC properties depending on individual circumstances. Very recently, SCC Housing Department has agreed that 5 properties will be set aside in general stock for care leavers.
13. In September 2015 80% of care leavers who were in contact were in suitable accommodation and highlights an upward trend in performance of 10% since March 2014. This compares to a national rate of 78% and outcomes in the area continue to rise although the service recognises that activity in this area must continue to drive improvement up to statistical neighbour rates of 88% and beyond. Latest information from within the pathways team indicates that the figure has increased to 91% over the past few weeks as a result of targeted work with the current cohort of young people.

Health

14. The health needs of care leavers is being better addressed through increased contact and engagement with LAC nurses and “drop in” visit arrangements. As per the wider group of children in care, care leavers engagement with the health assessment process has shown significant improvement. In total 85% of health assessments are completed on time (compared to 50% 12 months ago) and the quality of these assessments is thoroughly audited by the LAC Health Team. The named nurse for looked after children is engaged with relevant care leaver groups and is processing a regular pattern of consulting with them in relation to health matters. Some care leavers are even choosing to continue health assessments beyond their 18th birthdays.
15. Priorities going forward include the development and introduction of a health “passport” for all care leavers which is given to young people when they leave care. The health passports for all LAC will contain key health information about all children throughout their formative years and provide young people with a complete health history which is crucial in promoting and managing individual health needs.
16. Other work will focus on ensuring that the Local Authority better understands the emotional and mental health needs of young people prior to, and after they leave care, and ensure that services consistently meet identified needs, and promote services designed to address such needs.

Education, Training and Employment

17. Education, training and employment work with care leavers is receiving intensive work. Quarter 1 2015/16 data for the percentage of care leavers not in

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contact or NEET is 64% which is higher than both the national figure (55%) and statistical neighbour (41%). Recent focussed activity appears to have begun to address this situation and there is likely to be a fall in the NEET numbers in the next quarter of reporting.

18. Catch 22 are providing apprenticeship and employability support in the city and have committed to prioritising Southampton care leavers and City Deal have provided a part time worker to assist in this area. The City Deal worker dedicated to care leavers is at full capacity for referrals and the service is exploring access via other City Deal resources. Action is also required to further “join-up” services in as cohesive a manner as possible in order cover service gaps and deliver timely interventions.
19. A practitioners group is beginning to share experiences of best and most effective practice approaches to addressing current take up of opportunities in this area. Furthermore, a panel is to be formed to track the progress of individual young people who are NEET and allocate resources effectively.
20. In contrast, only 2 of the present 34 cohort of year 12 school leavers (LAC) are NEET and the service will work in a structured and systematic manner to ensure that these and future groups of year 12 young people are supported to remain in appropriate positive education, training and employment settings.
21. Of the current Year 11 cohort, 14 of the 31 children/young people have current Personal Education Plans (PEPs) in place. This matter is far from satisfactory and the responsible social care staff and the virtual head teacher are putting plans in place to ensure that the outstanding PEPs are put in place as a matter of urgency and then updated against a new process.

Participation and Engagement

22. The active participation of children and young people is a key priority for Children’s Services, as well as all other relevant partners. Our Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out a clear vision for practice.
23. The Children in Care Council directly supports the Corporate Parenting Board to measure and monitor the effectiveness and quality of ‘Corporate Parenting’ to children and young people; according to the views and experiences of the children who are in care. The board remains fully committed to listening to the voice of service users and the active involvement of children and young people within the decision-making processes.
24. The Young People in Care Council (YPICC) has had a fluctuating membership in the past year but consists currently of about 10 young people aged 16-21. The group meets on a monthly basis with an agenda negotiated between them and officers, and the Chair and Vice Chair also attend and participate at some

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Corporate Parenting meetings. The Lead Councillor for Children's Services continues to attend some of the YPICC meetings, as have the Principal Officer and Head of Children's services.

25. The group has worked at developing its own identity this year and is currently focused on encouraging increased participation from younger looked after children especially. The group's overall aim is to provide a voice for the wider population of looked after children and care leavers and to influence service development as a result.
26. An annual awards ceremony recognises the achievements and contribution of children and young people looked after.

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