

Scrutiny Committee Report

Date of Meeting: 13 January 2016

Report of: Pete Lambert, Head of Service Cared for Children

Subject/Title: Care Leavers – Response to task and finish report 2012

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Rachel Bailey, Children and Families Portfolio Holder

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 The Children and Families Scrutiny Committee established a Task and Finish Review in 2012 to examine the 16+ service for cared for children. The review considered assessment and planning for care leavers, personal support, financial arrangements and current and historical outcomes for Cheshire East care leavers.
- 1.2 Subsequently an update of the 2012 review and action plan was presented to Scrutiny Committee in December 2014 to outline the progress made to date and highlight areas for further action.
- 1.3 This report provides a further progress report as requested by Scrutiny Committee
- 1.4 The Task and Finish Review action plan (updated following the 2014 review) is contained in Appendix 1. The original action plan (2012) contained over 60 actions and the majority were completed ahead of the report back to Scrutiny Committee in 2014. As of today only one action remains open and this is due for final completion in February 2016 (Appendix 1, Point 13.3.9).
- 1.5 The Corporate Parenting Board will continue to monitor and scrutinise the progress being made against actions. This will ensure that services continue to improve outcomes for care leavers.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 The previously outstanding actions from the 2012 Task and Finish Review (Appendix 1) have been provided for information.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Children in the care of the local authority are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. The majority of children in care have suffered abuse or neglect and at any one time around 60,000 children are cared for in England; currently 396 children are in the care of Cheshire East.
- 3.2 Research continually tells us that care leavers show significantly lower academic achievement, are more likely to be unemployed, to have mental health needs, be homeless and be disproportionately represented in prison.

- 3.3 With this in mind the aim of the initial Task and Finish Review in 2012 was to explore how best to help care leavers make a successful and adjusted transition from care into sustainable independence and adulthood.
- 3.4 Local authorities have clear legal responsibilities towards the support of care leavers which is encapsulated in the role and responsibilities of being a corporate parent.
- 3.5 A care leaver is defined as a person who has been in the care of the local authority (looked after) for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who was in care on their 16th birthday. As of October 2015 there were 154 young people who had left care and were defined as Cheshire East care leavers (Relevant or Former Relevant). There were also 63 young people defined as eligible (aged 16-17 and still in care).
- 3.6 Since September 2013 services to care leavers in Cheshire East have been driven by Cheshire East's involvement in the New Belongings project. Cheshire East has been part of a North West cluster of local authorities working alongside Stockport, Trafford, Lancashire, Bury and Blackpool. New Belongings looks at how local authorities can create better services which are fully integrated, easily accessed and which respect care leavers as individuals, developing young adults and full members of community and society.
- 3.7 New Belongings aims to create a 'Gold Standard' in relation to services which support care leavers, sharing learning and best practice across local authorities. The Cheshire East New Belongings action plan is scrutinised and challenged by peers across the region and via the Cheshire East Corporate Parenting Board.
- 3.8 New Belongings has progressed a number of actions during 2015 supporting the emotional wellbeing of care leavers in Cheshire East together with improving their education, employment and training opportunities. Key achievements, which significantly overlap with the Task and Finish Review can be summarised as follows:

Transitional operational group set up in May 2015 to improve transition to adult. The appointment of a transitional worker.

Mental Health training delivered to professionals by care leavers

Care to be different programme supporting 38 care leavers with life skills, education and training
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(care to be different commenced during 2015)
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Fortnightly drop in sessions – 'one stop shop'.

DWP protocol established to support access to benefits. Monthly link with lead Personal Advisor re; employment opportunities

Take up of the Cygnet programme to get young people ready for work – currently 3 care leavers involved in work placements
Ring fenced properties secured for care leavers to support tenancy readiness and develop independence skills
Tenancy readiness packs to be launched in January/February 2016
Credit union established for care leavers
Appointment of a Cared for Nurse 16-25 in early 2016
New financial support for care leaver's policy being rolled out by February 2016. This improves incentives and support for care leavers attending further and higher education.
Ignition group established to improve coordination of accommodation resources for care leavers ensuring improved matching of need. Care leavers are encouraged to be actively involved in the group
Offer of support extended to care leavers up to the age of 25
Development of a Health App for care leavers which contains key information on health related issues such as sexual health, drugs and alcohol and arranging appointments (available via Apple store and Android)

- 3.9 Currently 98% of care leavers are deemed to be in suitable accommodation.
- 3.10 Staying Put arrangements are beginning to embed with 14 care leavers currently in 'Staying Put' arrangements with long term foster carers beyond the age of 18; this includes 5 who are part time and at University / residential college.
- 3.11 The Care Leavers Council continues to be an active group and led with the publication of the Easy Pleasy Cookbook in the summer of 2015. The book provides inspiration and ideas for care leavers to cook healthily for themselves on a tight budget.
- 3.12 In total 59% of care leavers (aged 19-21) are in employment, education or training. This includes 15 care leavers currently attending University, 15 on apprenticeships and 2 have started their own business.
- 3.12 Considering the low number of NEET in the wider Cheshire East population; this is an area which requires continued focus for care leavers. NEET amongst care leavers is a challenge for all local authorities and New Belongings will continue to drive work within this area.

4.0 Wards Affected and Local Ward Members

4.1 Care leavers may reside in all wards.

5.0 Legal Implications

5.1 Levels of risk if there are failures to meet statutory legal requirements

6.0 Financial Implications

6.1 No further financial implications outside of the current remit of the care leaver's service

7.0 Risk Management

7.1 Risks relate to failure to provide a good service to care leavers

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Appendix A

Recommendations from Care Leavers Review 2012: outstanding actions following 2014 review (December 2014)			
NO	RECOMMENDATION	RESPONSE	COMPLETED ON
13.2	<i>Changes to how the support the Council provides to care leavers is structured</i>		
13.2.6	That the Council explore the appointment of a funding co-ordinator to have a strategic and practical lead in maximising income for children and adults coming through social care and health systems, including GPs and hospitals. (p28 – para 8.16).	<p>Personal Advisors have been working with CWP and are extremely knowledgeable around income maximisation. PA's have a named link worker within each benefit office for care leavers and priority is given to care leavers turning 18.</p> <p>To support this further a welfare rights advisor is now placed within children's services with their role to extend to working with care leavers</p>	Completed.
13.3	<i>Training and support</i>		
13.3.3	That the Council provide budget management training for cared for children. (p29 – para 8.16).	<p>Independence Packs help to identify budgeting needs.</p> <p>PA's are undertaking 1-1 budgeting work with care leavers.</p> <p>Credit Union membership is now established and growing</p>	Completed
13.3.4	That the Council explorer initiating a mentoring scheme which would pair care leavers/young people with cared for children (p33 para 9.23).	Schemes have been explored and initial steps taken to develop proposals most relevant to Cheshire East..	Completed
13.3.7	That training events be made available for agency foster carers for a small charge. (p38 – para 9.41).	The LSCB training programme is available to the private sector subject to a small charge	completed

13.3.8	That the Council provide a range of tenancy workshops for those care leavers due to move into social housing – focusing on developing life skills, budgeting skills and information on good neighbour behaviour. (p44 – para 10.31).	Taster flats are available and form part of Pathway Planning Ignition panel (joint panel between CE and providers) provides overview of need and informs service provision. Also ensures better matching of services to support care leavers	Completed
13.3.9	That the Council provide 'practical' life skills training for cared for children e.g., cooking, cleaning, minor DIY tasks, prior to the pathway plan process. (p44 – para 10.33).	2 Personal Advisors lead on this work Independence skills training packs have been produced and will go out in February 2016. One stop shop drop in operates on a regular basis	Feb 2016
13.4	Benefits		
13.4.2	That the Council explore paying landlords directly for those care leavers who are deemed unable to manage their budgets. (p28 – para 8.16).	Guarantors scheme in place Budget management emphasised in work with care leavers. No evidence of care leavers currently losing tenancy due to rent arrears.	Completed
13.4.3	That the Council encourage the Department for Work and Pensions to enable 'jam jar' accounts for Universal Credit Payments in order to help facilitate budget management.	Jam Jar accounts are up and running for care leavers	Completed

	(p29 – para 8.16).		
13.4.4	That the Council work with the Department of Work and Pensions to enable young people to register for social housing at 17 years 6 months of age rather than at 18 to reduce pressure on the pathway planning process and double payment. (p28 – para 8.16).	Joint protocol in place with DWP and housing	Completed
13.5	<i>Housing</i>		
13.5.4	<p>That the Council explore providing semi-independent accommodation options for care leavers based on the following two models. (p43 – para 10.24):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small 3-4 bed units (staffed) with support available 24 hours a day. • In agreement with social housing associations, a small number of single bed tenancies be provided to accommodate 16 – 18 year old cared for young people with floating support being 	16+ accommodation options provide for a good range of provision. Planning and support is managed via the Ignition Panel (joint CE / providers panel)	completed

	provided by Residential Service Care Staff.		
13.5.6	That the Council ensure that care leavers in university can return to a foster/supported lodging placement during the vacation period. (p43 – para 10.27).	This has been revised in line with the recent Staying Put Policy.	Completed
13.5.7	That the Council open discussions with the three housing associations that operate in the Borough with the aim of re-establishing a joint protocol to prioritise a quota of social housing for care leavers. (p44 – para 10.30).	Confidence is improving between partners and Ignition is working with a number of providers to develop improved approaches to support to care leavers housing need.	completed
13.5.9	That the Council take steps to reduce the chance of loneliness for when a young person moves into independent accommodation, e.g., ensuring that housing placements are close to friends when appropriate and that social networks are facilitated. (p44 – para 10.34).	This will be taken account of during the development of the pathway plan. Improved matching of need via Ignition Panel	Completed
13.6	<i>Education, Employment and Training</i>		

13.6.5	That the Council extend the remit of the Virtual School from 19 to 25. (p33 – para 9.24).		Completed
13.6.6	That the Council encourage secondary schools to retain a link with a young person in care once they enter further education. (p34 – para 9.24).	Virtual School undertake this role and link to secondary school as appropriate	completed
13.6.7	That the Council encourage secondary schools and sites of further education to apply for the Buttle UK Quality Mark. (p34)	This is discontinued	
13.6.8	<p>That the Council initiate a programme of support to better prepare cared for children for the demands of work. That this include (p34 – 35):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An incremental approach to work experience – beginning with taster days and ending with increasingly tailored and intensive work experience placements. Working with 	<p>Cygnet Project established and is currently providing apprenticeships for 6 young people (including care leavers)</p> <p>Care to be Different has also been established and provides work experience for care leavers supported by mentors</p> <p>A number of Care Leavers embark upon the Prince's Trust.</p>	Completed

	<p>the Government's 'From Care2Work' programme to support this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council adopting a policy in which a work experience placement would be available to a cared for child every week of the year. • The Council strongly encouraging cared for children to participate and complete life skill development courses with existing (Prince's Trust) and newly developed partnerships. 		
13.6.10	<p>That the Council ensure that Personal Advisors are provided with sufficient training so that there is a consistency of service across the team. That this includes training on care leavers' entitlements and need. (p22 – para 7.8).</p>	<p>Training provided through the Staff Development Service.</p> <p>Group Manager leads the New Belongings Project which is pursuing a good standard service for care leavers. Training events and workshops form key part of the work</p>	completed

Recommendations from Health and Cared for Children Review 2012			
NO	RECOMMENDATION	RESPONSE	COMPLETED ON
3.	<i>Health Booklet</i>		
3. (a)	That any reprint of the booklet includes information about the availability of free prescriptions for 16 – 18 year olds who are in full time education.	Link provided to explain free prescriptions for care leavers and 16-18 year olds in full time education	Completed
5.	<i>Leisure Passes and Sport Fitness</i>		
5. (a)	That some form of provision be made for Cared for Children who are placed out of borough to still access free leisure facilities in the same way as C4Cs who are placed in borough. The Group suggests this could be done by way of a small personal budget for each C4C to follow them around in their out of area placement(s). The Group feels this would ensure that C4Cs who are out of area are able to continue to participate in sport/activities they enjoy; promotes health and wellbeing and ensures they receive the same provision as an in-borough C4C	Practical solutions for individual care leavers has been provided and is the most pragmatic solution to managing potentially complex arrangements across LA boundaries	Completed
5. (c)	That consideration be given to enabling a C4C's friend who is attending to participate in sport with them to receive a reduced price entry where the activity requires more than one person, for example, a badminton game which cannot be played alone	Practical solutions have been provided to individual care leavers. Leisure Services are currently considering options within an overall pricing review.	Completed
7.	<i>Cared for Children who are Parents</i>		

7. (a)	That priority be given to investigating how mum and baby foster care is best provided in Cheshire East;	Mum and baby foster care has been researched within the fostering service and continues to inform training for foster carers and service development	Completed
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