

Cheshire East Council

Children and Families Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 26th September 2016

Report of: Pete Lambert, Head of Cared for Children

Subject/Title: Care Leavers Update

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Liz Durham

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an update to the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee on national and local developments in relation to Cheshire East care leavers.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. The Children and Families Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

- 2.1.1 Note the contents of the report;
- 2.1.2 Note the proposed future updates around national and local developments.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. The Children and Families Scrutiny Committee should be aware of any national or local issues that are likely to impact on care leavers and be able to scrutinise and challenge performance to improve outcomes.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. None; this is an update report.

5. Background

National Developments

5.1 Children and Social Work Bill

- 5.1.1 The Children and Social Work Bill, published earlier this year, is currently progressing. The main elements of the Bill are:

Looked-after children and care leavers

- Standards for how local authorities should act as a 'corporate parent' to support children in care and as they move into adult life.
- A requirement on local authorities to consult on and publish a 'local offer' to care leavers, setting out the services they are entitled to.
- An extension to the right to a Personal Adviser, someone who will make sure care leavers receive the support they need as they transition into adulthood, to all who want one up to the age of 25.

Regulation of social workers

- A specialist regulator for social work, to enable a clear focus on standards and effective training and development.

5.1.2 The DfE has begun developing draft statutory guidance that will underpin the corporate parenting principles set out in the new Children and Social Work Bill. These principles, once finalised, will be applicable to all LAs in England but will not replace duties that LAs already have under the Children Act 1989. To ensure this guidance is as useful as possible the DfE is seeking examples of what good corporate parenting looks like in local areas in order to inform this work. The Bill has implications for how Cheshire East delivers its services and further updates will be provided to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

5.2 Children's social care reform: a vision for change'

In January 2016, the Department for Education (DfE) published '*Children's social care reform: a vision for change*'. The paper set a vision and reform programme for children's social care, structured around three key areas, known as pillars:

- **People and leadership** - bringing the best people into the profession, equipping them with the right knowledge and skills and developing leaders equipped to nurture practice excellence.
- **Practice and systems** - creating the right environment for excellent practice and innovation to flourish and creating a learning culture, drawing on both best practice and the lessons when things go wrong.
- **Governance and accountability** - making sure that what we are doing is working, using data to show the strengths and weaknesses in the system, and developing innovative new organisational models with the potential to radically improve services.

5.3 Putting Children First

In July 2016, the DfE published '*Putting Children First: delivering our vision for excellent children's social care*'. The paper sets out – against each of the above three pillars – the DfE's programme of reform in children's social care for the next four years, detailing how it will create the conditions to enable Government, local authorities and their local partners, social workers and

other professionals such as foster carers to provide consistently excellent children's social care.

5.4 'Keep On Caring - Supporting Young People from Care to Independence'

Following on from '*Putting Children First*', the government published 'Keep on Caring' in July 2016, which sets out specifically and in more depth what it means to put care leavers first.

Firstly, it sets out how the government will use the Innovation Programme to rethink how services are delivered and what support is provided, with a strong focus on finding new and better ways of helping care leavers develop the social networks that will sustain them not just in the years immediately after leaving care, but throughout their lives. The government will also support new ways of delivering services, for example through Trusts, which have a clear and specific focus on improving care leavers' life chances.

Secondly, it sets out how the government will strengthen the culture of corporate parenting, both locally – through planned legislative measures – and through changes to central government policies, so that they better respond to care leavers' unique status and circumstances.

Finally, it sets out how the government will support and challenge local areas, so that all deliver to the standards of the best.

5.5 Not Seen, Not Heard

The Care Quality Commission (CQC), the independent regulator of all health and social care services in England, recently published '*Not Seen, Not Heard*', a report on children's safeguarding and looked after children services in England. The review is the result of two years of research, looking into the quality of care that young people receive with local authority areas. The CQC's summary findings are as follows:

- Two out of every three young people we spoke to told us they didn't feel involved in their care;
- Most areas we visited couldn't prove to us they were making a difference to children and young people;
- Health staff need to improve how they share information with the right people at the right time; and
- When young people are old enough to leave children's care services it can be very difficult for them to move to adult services.

CQC made the following recommendations:

- Children and young people must be actively engaged in their care
- Services must ensure their focus is on outcomes
- More needs to be done to identify children at risk of harm
- Children and young people must have access to the emotional and mental health support they need.

These recommendations are currently being considered by the Corporate Parenting Operational Group and proposed actions will be reported back to the Committee.

Local Developments

5.6 National Transfer Scheme – Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Nationally, 2015 saw a significant increase in the volume of unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) arriving in the UK, with 3,043 claims being lodged; representing a 56% increase on the previous year. In light of the varying commitments to support unaccompanied minors, the Government have established one national dispersal/transfer scheme, which will deal with all three strands of asylum and refugee children who will ultimately require local authority care provision. This ensures a fair and equitable distribution at a national level, as opposed to only a small number of local authorities, eg, Kent, being overburdened with UASC applicants, as is currently the case.

The Immigration Act 2016 provides a legislative framework with four key provisions to assist in the implementation of a national scheme. These being:

- To make the transfer of legal responsibility from one local authority to another much easier.
- Places a duty on the local authority to provide information about available services.
- Places an obligation on the local authority to set out in writing reasons for not supporting the transfer of children.
- Provides a duty to accept the transfer of relevant children under a mandatory scheme, if sufficient voluntary commitment is not provided by local authorities.

On 4th July a regional event took place, with strong senior officer and political representation to discuss a way forward for the north west. A task and finish group was established to:

- Develop a proposal for a regional approach to standards to work with unaccompanied minors – using evidence of what works/best practice from areas with more experience.
- Develop a proposal for a regional approach to completing age assessments, aimed at reducing the likelihood of judicial review of decisions, if through a consistent approach risks may be mitigated and shared.
- Based on information already known about sufficiency of accommodation – consider and make proposals for local authorities to consider, based on age, vulnerability and need; considering joint opportunities to commission facilities that might reduce cost pressures.
- Using knowledge of resources already in place e.g. regional Fostering Front Door, make recommendations about how this can occur.

- A single approach to development of a marketing and communications strategy to attract interest from specific communities who may offer support and accommodation; with a focus on the development of shared accommodation and supported lodgings options.

It is anticipated that Care leaver status would apply to the majority of young people transferred to Cheshire East. This will subsequently impact on the case loads and capacity of the Care Leavers Team. There is a potential shortfall in the home office grant to fund these additional young people and this is being raised locally and nationally.

5.7 Care Leaver Pledge

Cheshire East care leavers and professionals worked together earlier in the year to decide on the 10 key things that would improve the help and support care leavers receive. Regionally care leavers said that they wanted:

- To feel listened to by everyone who is supporting us
- For our friendships to be valued
- To have accurate information about our rights
- Council tax exemption for care leavers up to 25
- Help to get into work
- To have our life choices respected
- Improved multi-agency working for care leavers
- To be able to remain in care homes until we're 21, if we ask to
- To be encouraged and supported to pursue our interests and form our own identities
- Better mental health provision for care leavers.

5.8 Overview of progress within Cheshire East care leaver services.

Care leavers to be better prepared and supported to live independently

- The Ignition Panel has been established for 16/17 years olds providing greater accommodation option and choice, input and voice of YP
- Care Leaver Entitlements – One minute guide produced and supported by workshop with SWs and PA's
- Revision of existing Care Leavers Financial Policy and consultation process in progress. Aim to launch Care Leavers Offer for January 2017
- Identify champions across CIN/CP teams and training offer to all parts of the service.
- Commissioning arrangements for Housing options post 18s, ring-fenced properties
- Personal Advisor allocated on turning 16 working alongside SW.

- Personal Advisor support is continuing beyond 21 and up to 25 yrs of age. Cheshire East is at the forefront of this work having taken part in New Belongings.
- Pathway Plans analysis and training specifically to look at accommodation needs, transition and preparation.
- Audits and coaching sessions highlighting themes
- Improved communication across agencies and services around need
- Increased use of workshops on independent living, workbooks and tools

5.9 Improved access to education, training and employment

- Since June 2015, we have had a dedicated EET worker (18 hours) per week
- From 1st October 2016 – employment of EET worker secured on a 2 year temporary contract as Work Coach to care leavers from the Innovation Fund. £120,000 has been allocated to develop a virtual support team in the care leavers service to focus on EET.
- ‘A living wage for care leavers’ is currently being researched to test the viability of underpinning a growth in apprenticeships.
- Decrease in NEET figure of young people 18-20 years (46%) (drop from 52%)
- Data testing and cleansing of LL creating greater accuracy in recording
- ‘Care to be Different’, VfC active mentoring
- Proactive working with young people to record their aspirations in their pathway plan

5.10 Experiencing stability and feeling safe and secure

- High compliance with statutory care leaver visits and less than 5% of care leavers are ‘not in touch’ with the service but contact is established via text, email or family member confirming they are safe and well.
- Ignition Panel is assisting with helping care leavers understand the options available in their local housing market and increased choice of options for care leavers
- Increased use of Staying Put arrangement. Currently 19 care leavers have taken up this offer (end of July 2016).
- Revised risk assessment tool for care leavers in Foyer accommodation to ensure young people feel safe, secure and supported in their accommodation

5.11 Improved access to Health Support

- Appointment of the 16+ nurse
- New Senior PA role to support Team Manager and assist with 16/17 year olds and transition work and pregnant/parent care leavers
- Targeted approach to working with young mothers and parents headed by senior PA/deputy manager
- SDQ tool being developed with IRO service and PA Health champion

5.12 Achieving Financial Stability

- Reducing crisis payments to young people by supporting them with budgeting skills and workshop
- Credit Union accounts set up with care leavers who have debt issues and unable to obtain bank accounts
- Cheshire East is one of the first local authorities to provide exemption from Council Tax for care leavers (aged 18-21 years)
- Skills to Foster training now incorporates care leaver input to present on readiness for independence, preparation, skills and moving on and Staying Put arrangement.
- Retaining links with DWP and attendance at service meetings twice yearly to provide updates on impact to care leavers.

6. Wards Affected and Local Ward Members

- 6.1. Although the number of Cheshire East cared for children and care leavers is relatively small, they are a vulnerable cohort, who live across Cheshire East and in other local authority areas.

7. Implications of Recommendation

7.1. Policy Implications

There are a number of policy implications as a result of local and national developments and these will be reported, as appropriate to the relevant Committee.

7.2. Legal Implications

The national and local developments described in this report are wide ranging and will in many particulars have legal implications. Legal advice will be sought, as appropriate, upon all relevant emerging issues.

7.3. Financial Implications

The continued increase in demand for social care services for cared for children and unaccompanied asylum seekers will have a budgetary impact and these are being reported separately to Cabinet. The Council as a whole is managing a substantial reduction in resources from Government, savings resulting from transformation programmes etc will help, but demand for these services is continuing to increase. Therefore, the allocation of additional resources to this service will require greater reductions elsewhere.

7.4. Human Resources Implications

There are potential staffing implications from the increase in the cared for children population, in particular around unaccompanied asylum seeker children. These are being reported separately to Cabinet.

7.5. Equality Implications

Cared for children and care leavers tend to have poorer outcomes when compared to their peers.

7.6. Rural Community Implications

None.

7.7. Public Health Implications

No specific issues identified at this stage.

8. Risk Management

Managing the increase in demand for social care services is a current risk on the Children and Families risk register. The number of referrals requiring a social work assessment continues to increase and consequently the numbers for children and young people in care and on a child protection plans have increased significantly over the past year. Whilst this is in line with national increases, there is a risk that if the current increase in demand for services continues, this will affect staff's ability to deliver effective social work practice.

9. Background Papers

- *'Children's social care reform: a vision for change'*
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-reform-a-vision-for-change>
- *Putting Children First* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/putting-children-first-our-vision-for-childrens-social-care>

- *'Keep on caring: supporting young people from care to independence'*
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keep-on-caring-supporting-young-people-from-care-to-independence>

10. Contact Information

Contact details for this report are as follows:-

Name:	Pete Lambert
Designation:	Head of Cared for Children
Tel. No.:	07870 896895
Email:	pete.lambert@cheshireeast.gov.uk