

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 1st April 2014

Report of: Julie Lewis Principal Manager Cared for Children and Care Leavers

Subject/Title: Response to Care Leavers/Health Task and Finish Recommendations

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update members regarding the report to Cabinet on 12th Nov 2013 – Cared for Children and Care Leavers.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Cheshire East Council is fully committed to ensuring Cared for Children and Care Leavers make the most of the opportunities they have and get the best support possible. Significant investments continue to be made and rigorous checking of the best ideas and practices available is paramount to continuing to be successful. In policy development terms, for example, the recent 50% increase in the Leaving Care Grant to £3000 coupled with a range of other support is widely recognised as the best package of support across the country. Furthermore additional support including bursary increases has resulted in 12 of our cared for young people attending university – the most in the history of Cheshire East.
- 2.2 In light of Cheshire East leading the way nationally on a number of areas for cared for children and care leavers the Council is part of a small, select group of Local Authority's piloting the 'New Belongings' project. This project strives to develop a 'gold standard' of services for care leavers and will report to Ministers in the summer of 2014. A number of our own children and young people are involved in this initiative and findings will influence both national and local policy approaches.
- 2.3 In order to continually review and refine ideas and activities to ensure best practice the Children and Families Scrutiny Task and Finish Group completed a review of the 16 Plus service for Cared for Children and care leavers, the aim of the review being to look at how to improve the outcomes of some of the Borough's most vulnerable young adults.

- 2.4 Member engagement has been a key success factor in leading, challenging and supporting developments and the depth and quality of this Task and Finish Group report coupled with visits to frontline teams and engagement with children and young people is testimony to this. Also contained in the recommendations are the findings from the Health Scrutiny Committee regarding the health of Cared for Children. Finally the Portfolio Holder for Children and Families invited the Children and Families Policy Development Group to consider and comment upon the report.
- 2.5 The report was initially presented to Cabinet in November 2013 and a request was made for Officers to both review recommendations and update on progress. This report concentrates on this task and Appendix 1 highlights in detail the story behind the headlines. In summary regarding the recommendations, over 50 in total broadly grouped into 10 sections, extremely positive progress is being made. The vast majority of actions have been completed and practice and policy updated. Examples of activities completed include;
- Leaving Care Grant, which assists young people to move to independent accommodation, amongst other things substantially increased
 - Increase in the number of supported lodgings
 - Practical Life Skills training to equip young people with the practical skills to ensure a successful transition to adulthood implemented
 - Shared Lives policy to allow young people to remain in foster care longer implemented to aid young people to continue positively with education opportunities.
 - Children and Young People designed easier understandable information for the likes of careers advice, employability schemes, leaving care services, etc.
 - Staying Put policy implemented so young people can return to foster care when in University
 - University bursaries increased to £2000 per annum from £2000 per lifetime of course.
 - Pathway Plan meetings and recording documents changed to ensure foster carer views are recorded and acted upon
 - Investment made to increase front line staffing compliment, this includes Social Workers, Personal Advisors and Health resource for Cared for children with the appointment of a specialist 16plus nurse with mental health experience.

- Introduction of a “welcome to Cheshire East event for Foster carers.

Activities currently being progressed include;

- Vulnerable Persons Housing strategy – currently out for consultation - includes specific provision for care leavers. A draft service specification for a range of supported accommodation for care leavers has been drafted and we are currently exploring the feasibility of making payments to landlords in specific appropriate circumstances. Work with the DWP to reduce the qualifying age for housing support is also being progressed
- Increased resource into the Virtual school for care leavers and increased links with further and higher education establishments. Development of information relating to the Buttle UK quality mark for secondary schools is also being progressed.
- Exploration of personal budgets for care leavers and leisure activities.

3.0 For Discussion

- 3.1 Cabinet requested the views of Officers in regard to recommendation 13.2.2: *“That alongside the Lead Member for Corporate Parenting, a non-Executive Councillor, with no Chairmanship duties, be appointed as a ‘Cared for Children’ champion to liaise with cared for children and to drive through the Corporate Parenting agenda and to monitor the outcomes of the Task Group reports on cared for children. (p21 – para 7.4)”*.
- 3.2 The view is that as all elected members are Corporate parents and the Council has a portfolio holder – as per statutory guidance in place to deal with issues in regard to children, therefore the recommendation should not be taken forward.
- 3.3 An initial assessment of the a charging policy for foster carers from the private sector has shown that the administrative resource needed may well mean that this is not cost effective. Further detail is being sought.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 Financial implications connected to the content of this report have been found within service budgets.

5.0 Recommendations

- 5.1 Members note progress in light of the recommendations from the work undertaken by the Task and Finish – Scrutiny group.
- 5.2 Members endorse the recommendation not to pursue the appointment of a non-executive Councillor as a Cared for Children champion.

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