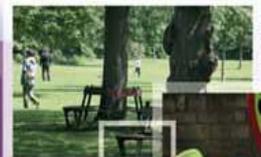




Nottinghamshire
County Council

Health and Wellbeing From Care to Independence Scrutiny Review



From Care to Independence

The Health and Wellbeing Standing Committee agreed to include in the scrutiny work programme a review of the transition services available for young people who are leaving the care provided by the County Council to live independently. Planning and support available for these young people as they move into adulthood was seen to be essential, and we wanted to examine how, and how well, this support is provided and tailored to ensure that it meets their individual needs.

The Review:

- identified current provision of support to young people
- considered if current practice meets need
- discussed with practitioners in the care system and the aftercare service their roles and responsibilities
- consulted with service providers and young people.

The Committee undertaking this review met between October 2010 and March 2011.

The review was carried out by County Councillors:

Fiona Asbury (Chair)

Barrie Cooper

Jim Creamer

Bob Cross

Vincent Dobson

Mel Shepherd

Keith Walker

Chris Winterton (Vice Chair)

The scrutiny review depends on the involvement of a number of different people and we would like to thank the following for their contribution:

Michelle Lee, Aftercare Service Manager, Children, Families and Culture

Matt Wesson, Trainee Social Worker, Karen Walters, Social Worker

Gail White, Social Worker, Barbara Martin, Personal Adviser

Tom Arams, Personal Adviser, Rebecca Bowring and Julie Wilson Education, Employment and Training Advisers

Pam Rosseter, Group Manager, Quality Assurance and Safeguarding

Mike Law, Independent Reviewing Officer

Yvonne Cottingham, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Judi Juno, Commissioning Officer, Supporting People
Care leavers.



Contents

Review summary

Background evidence

Summary of recommendations

Review Summary

1. Looked after children and young people leaving care are some of the most vulnerable in society. It is widely recognised that care leavers are more likely than other young people to have obtained fewer GCSEs, be unemployed, make up a disproportionate number of the prison population and have mental health issues. There are around 600 children and young people at any one time in the care of the County Council who, for varying reasons, are no longer able to live with their families. The County Council and Councillors have a duty to act as the 'corporate parent' for these children and young people, which means the local authority should look after these children in a responsible and supportive way, much as any other parent would look after their children. This role is not just restricted to Children and Young Peoples services but applies to all services across the authority.
2. Children and young people enter care for many reasons including parental bereavement, parents unwilling or unable to care, family breakdown, removal because of abusive or neglectful parenting. The pre care experiences of a child can have a long term effect and impact on emotional, social and behavioural development. These early experiences can become particularly influential during teenage years when young people need to develop the skills and confidence needed to move through to adulthood and independent living.
3. Care leavers remain the responsibility of the last local authority to accommodate them. Most care leavers opt to stay in Nottinghamshire but a significant number choose to reside in neighbouring authorities.
4. Young people who have been in care are more likely to be leaving 'home' younger. Many young people remain in the family home, but looked after children (LAC) are expected to live independently and manage their own accommodation and money from a much younger age. Care leavers are expected to manage their own income and home as soon as they reach 18, or claim housing benefit to contribute to a continuing placement with their former foster carers.
5. Care leavers who choose to leave foster care, or a residential placement before they are 18, do so for a variety of reasons possibly because of a placement breakdown or because they want to live more independently. Initiatives to reduce the number of care leavers who leave early have been developed and are working. Of the current young people using the County Council aftercare services for 16 - 24 years old only 17 are 16 or 17.

6. Care leavers are as diverse as the wider population requiring different levels of support and should not be treated as a homogenous group.
7. The long term outcomes for young people leaving care are not tracked as the success of the current strategies used for individual care leavers is not available. Outcomes at age 19 are measured such as settled accommodation placements, employment, education and training outcomes and whether the Local Authority still has contact with the young person. The value of the pathway plan and the success of the personalised preparation are difficult to evaluate without improved monitoring being developed.
8. There are around 320 eligible care leavers receiving support from the Aftercare Team (March 2010). Annually approximately 45 young people leave care. There has been an increase in the number of looked after children in the past twelve months and this will result in additional numbers of young people needing aftercare services in the future.
9. We recognise the commitment and dedication of the Aftercare team who provide a comprehensive service which supports young people leaving care through the transition from being "Looked After" to independence and adulthood.

Background Evidence

10. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 places a duty on children's services to provide accommodation and maintenance for young people and its key aim is to delay the move to independent living until young people have been adequately prepared and planned for the transition.
11. Nottinghamshire County Council's Aftercare Service works with young people typically aged from 15½ to 21 years, supporting them through the transition from being 'Looked After' (LAC) to independence and adulthood using the pathway planning process. There are approximately 26 staff and this includes qualified and unqualified social workers, employment and training advisors, and an accommodation adviser. The service currently offers support to approximately 300 young people who all have individual needs and aspirations and this also includes a number of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people.
12. Young people entitled to after care services are:
 - 16 and 17 year olds who were LAC for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and are still LAC are described as Eligible
 - 16 and 17 year olds, who were LAC for at least 13 weeks since age of 14 but are no longer LAC, are described as Relevant
 - 18 – 21 year olds who were either Eligible or Relevant young people under 18 years, are described as Former Relevant.

The County Council therefore has a duty to:

Age 16 – 18

- develop a pathway plan to include an assessment and how needs will be met, the financial support required and accommodation needed
- allocate a personal advisor

Age 18 -21

- maintain contact and support through the personal adviser
- assist with costs for education, employment and training

Age 21 plus

- support 18 – 21 year olds if in education or training
- ensure vacation accommodation if in higher education.

The role of the personal advisor, needs assessment and pathway plan

13. All young people have a personal advisor based in the aftercare team, to provide advice, support and develop an individually tailored pathway plan which addresses changing needs. When a young person is 15½ they are referred to the aftercare team and allocated a personal advisor, even though there may be no imminent intention for the young person to leave care. The care leaver has some input when deciding who their personal advisor should be and issues of gender and ethnic origin are considered. When the young person is formally discharged from care the personal advisor takes over from the children's social worker.
14. The needs assessment is completed by the time a young person is 16 years and 3 months old and identifies the help and support a young person will need to take them through to adulthood. This will form part of the pathway plan.
15. The pathway plan sets out a young person's goals and the processes by which they can be achieved. These plans can be adjusted to meet changing circumstances and have a contingency planning element so that a 'back up' to initial actions are available if needed. The young person is fully involved in the pathway planning process. Some young people still have contact with their parents and may want them involved in the pathway planning process. The aftercare service will support young people who want family involvement should the young person decide it is a relationship they want to continue. Most young people participate in the pathway planning process. Those that do not still have to have a plan prepared and their lack of cooperation is noted in the plan which is regularly revisited to make every effort to make them engage with its development. The plans have explicit objectives, identifying who is responsible for each action, the timescales for achieving it and contingency arrangements should it fail. The plan covers issues relating to accommodation, life skills, education and training, financial support, and specific identified support if needed. This is an active document which incorporates the wishes and aspirations of the individual care leaver. The pathway plan is reviewed every 6 months until the young person is 21 years. Young people over 21 are not abandoned. A personal advisor is no longer closely involved but can still be contacted by a care leaver should support be needed. Care leavers in higher education can retain

a personal adviser and those with specific issues that meet the criteria for service will be referred to adult services.

Role of the Independent Reviewing Officer

16. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) contribute to improving the outcomes for looked after children. They quality assure the care planning process ensuring that the plans are based on detailed and informed assessment which provide a response to the child's needs. Whilst in care the IRO chairs a review, at least 6 monthly, but more frequent if required. All young people leaving care between the ages of 16 and 18 have a leaving care review chaired by an IRO to ensure support is in place for that young person. A further leaving care review can be held if the IRO is not satisfied with the plans for that young person. The key issues discussed at the review will include accommodation, budgeting, training and education, benefits, alcohol and smoking and emotional well being. They have to ensure the pathway plan meets the needs and aspirations of the young person are considered.

Pathway planning includes support with:

Finance

17. Eligible and relevant 16 and 17 year olds are not able to claim benefit and are given an allowance by the aftercare team. It is the duty of the local authority to meet the income maintenance and accommodation costs for 16 and 17 year old care leavers. Financial support will include food and utility bills, pocket money, transport cost for education and training and clothing. Allowances are calculated so that they are not less than a young person would receive should they be eligible to claim benefits. This allowance is linked to Income Support/ Job Seekers Allowance and currently is set at £51.85 per week. Exceptions to this include lone parents and young people with long term health conditions. Personal advisors help young people maximise their income through the benefit system.
18. Equipment necessary for training or employment is supplied by the authority and this includes transport costs to college, books and equipment.
19. Personal advisors support young people to manage their money, creating budget plans and helping to maximising benefits and manage debt problems. Learning to control a defined budget can prove difficult for some of these young people and crisis payments (also known as section 17 or section 24 payments) are available if required, these can be food parcels or payment of utility bills and are available in order to prevent unnecessary suffering.
20. Care leavers may be entitled to a Home Establishment Grant to help them buy items they need when moving into their own accommodation. The one off grant (currently £2000), is available for them to purchase necessities like bedding and kitchen equipment. The allowance is discretionary and for essential items only. A personal advisor will help the young person to spend this money effectively. Large expenses like home insurance and TV licences are provided for the first 12 months of a young person living independently.

Education, Employment and Training

21. Interrupted schooling, poor basic literacy and numeracy skills, lower educational achievement, low motivation, lack of social and employment skills and parental support, can make it difficult for some care leavers to obtain training or employment opportunities.
22. Three dedicated Education and Training Officers (EETAs), work with individual care leavers to help them make the best choices around education, employment and training, planning effective post 16 options that suit needs and aspirations helping access to training courses and employment opportunities.
23. Typically EETAs work with 18-21 year olds but can work with some young people until they are 24 if they are engaged in higher education. They encourage care leavers into employment, education or training using a wide range of strategies which take into account particular barriers/issues or problems affecting care leavers. Young people leaving care have a number of obstacles which make it difficult for them to obtain a job and stay in work. In addition to poor educational experiences, lack of training and ready for work skills, plus the possibility of losing benefit, they may have unstable accommodation, transport problems and a greater incidence of substance and alcohol misuse. EETA work to build up poor self esteem and confidence and develop relationships, actively helping to seek opportunities and act as an advocate with colleges, training providers and employers.
24. Young care leavers who enter employment are prepared with the practical skills needed to search for a job, complete job application forms and interview skills. The equipment necessary to undertake training or employment will be provided by the local authority.
25. Should a care leaver not be in employment, education and training (NEET), a worker will maintain in contact with the young person to encourage them to consider the options available (to return to education, seek training or work). In addition the EETA acts as an advocate on behalf of care leavers with colleges, training providers, employers, the Job Centre and the Prince's Trust. EETAs advise how to maximise income to encourage care leavers to continue in education, accessing the College Learners Support Fund or Care to learn which provides childcare for learners between 16 and 20 for education or training. The EETA also helps care leavers access the programmes of the Princes Trust work with young people to give them the confidence to return to education, training or seek employment.
26. Nottinghamshire is unusual in that it has dedicated officers to undertake this work. Many local authorities depend solely on the Connexions service. This is reflected in NI 48, 72 % of care leavers in Nottinghamshire are in education employment and training compared with the national average of 63% (May 2010). There are a small number of young people leaving care who continue into higher education who are supported with practical help such as setting up accommodation and transporting belongings, in addition to financial help in the form of bursaries to make this possible.

27. We found that the strict rules regarding signing for JSA may undermine some care leavers who are in part time work or continuing in education and believe that there should be greater understanding from the job centre that this can undermine some care leavers aspirations and long term ambitions. We consider financial support for these young people - which would enable them to obtain foundation and basic learning which would equip them to take up paid work rather than become dependent on benefit - should be funded by the County Council. The County Council in its role as corporate parent to these young people should encourage and assist them to obtain qualifications which will enable them to take up paid work. Young people will be financially supported in education until they reach the age of 25 provided they started the course before their 19th birthday. Many care leavers may have had an interrupted education and want to return to education after their 19th birthday but would not be financially supported to do this. We consider this may be a barrier for some young people who have had disrupted education and may not be able to attain the qualifications needed to enter further education by their 19th birthday, or they may have not decided what they want to do. We feel that consideration should be given to increasing the age limit for the small number of young people who would require this financial support extending.

Recommendation

Consideration be given to funding care leavers who have their welfare benefits removed if they continue in education. The County Council should continue to fund care leavers who extend their education or training beyond 19.

28. We consider the County Council, as one of the largest employers in the area should accept its role as corporate parent by making provision of work experience taster days, work placements and apprenticeships for young people leaving care. More needs to be done to help these young people into work. Failure to secure employment will have a long term effect on their future. To encourage aspiration for care leavers the County Council should make available opportunities for young people to have taster days, to make them aware of the wide range of jobs that are available, what is involved, and the qualifications required, a role that is often undertaken by parents. In addition work placements are needed that will offer additional support to help these young people develop key skills that will prepare them for work. These opportunities have to some extent to be needs led. Young care leavers have a diverse range of skills and goals and a scheme whereby young people could approach the County Council with their aspirations rather than young people just being slotted into a placement has to be promoted. We feel these young people should have the priority for any apprenticeship opportunities available in the County Council and consideration be given to some posts redesigned to make them appropriate to become apprenticeships.

Recommendation

Children in care and care leavers should have access to a range of employability opportunities within the County Council:

- including work inspiration events, taster events and priority for work experience opportunities
- priority for places on any future corporate scheme for apprenticeships,
- a guaranteed interview for any job for which they have the appropriate qualifications.

In addition contractors for County Council services should be encouraged to offer employability opportunities in line with this commitment.

Accommodation

29. Accommodation for young people leaving care is a major issue. Care leavers need stable and secure accommodation if they are to be able to move into adulthood and take up education or training. The local authority has a duty to fund accommodation for 16/17 year olds and this is usually provided through supported accommodation. After age 17 this is mostly provided by the district housing authority and paid for through the benefit system.
30. The Supporting People programme commissions and funds a variety of accommodation for a range of vulnerable people with the aim of supporting them to remain in appropriate accommodation and become more independent. For young people this can be supported housing with staff on site or visiting staff, supported lodgings such as living with a host family and floating support i.e. visiting once a week into own home or to support homeless young people to find a suitable home. Supporting People is not specifically for care leavers. They are, however, one of the priority groups and there is an agreement between children's services and supporting people providers, about good practice in ways of working with this group of young people. We are concerned that changes to the Supporting People programme may result in a lack of suitable accommodation, with appropriate support mechanisms, may not be available for care leavers to live independently and consider that stable placements for this group of young people should be considered as a priority.
31. Currently a framework contract is being developed which aims to establish a broad range of service options for the 16+ population of 'looked after or eligible aftercare' children. This will enable the development of a consistent framework contract and enable each provider to satisfy benchmark criteria to ensure standards of cost and quality are achieved. The framework will include accommodation where there is 24 hours on site support, part time on site support, accommodation with offsite support and provision of temporary accommodation with limited support. There is a commitment to increase the range of provision and once the framework is in place any shortfall in service (such as geographical location which lacks suitable accommodation) will be addressed through the tendering process.
32. We are concerned that the group of young care leavers who have low level or fluctuating mental and emotional issues should be in suitable and

appropriate accommodation that will meet their needs. The additional support that has been available needs to be maintained and any reduction in the accommodation commissioned Supporting People programme should not jeopardise the provision. There will be some care leavers who because of their former experiences will need additional assistance for their emotional and behavioural well being if they are to be able to lead a successful independent life and we feel this should be a priority when developing the framework

Recommendation

The framework contract for the provision of supported accommodation includes accommodation which will provide the appropriate level of support needed by care leavers with low level or fluctuating mental and emotional needs.

33. The House of Lords judgement in May 2009 r (G) v Southwark gives legal clarification regarding the accommodation of homeless and vulnerable 16-17 year olds. The ruling will increase the number of young people becoming looked after children who were formally dealt with under housing legislation by housing authorities. This will result in a greater number being eligible for support as care leavers and increasing demand for support from personal advisers and financial support from the County Council. The emergence of these new entrants to the looked after category will have differing needs/service requirements and we consider that this issue should be examined in more detail and to ascertain if these young people are receiving the level of support they need.

Recommendation

Analysis is undertaken of the scale and impact of the Southwark Judgment on Children's Services.

Further examination to identify that the 16 and 17 year old new entrants to the looked after system are receiving the support they need.

Health and Emotional Support

34. The pathway plan focuses on a number of key areas and included in this is life skills, social relationships, health and emotional support. The plan will identify which agency or how this support will be provided. The Children Leaving Care Act states that young people who have left the care system should have contact with a social worker at least 4 times a year until age 21. This can be difficult for those young people who are not in full time education who have chosen to live independently. The legislation identifies a Social Worker as having responsibility for the statutory elements of the pathway plan, and a personal advisor assists with more practical skills elements. Personal support to young people also includes assistance to stay healthy, which may not be a priority for young people when they begin to live independently. Assistance to register with a GP, advice on healthy eating, substance misuse and healthy relationships will be available through

the personal advisor who may refer them on to other agencies if appropriate.

35. Preventing pregnancy is a key issue for young people leaving care. Poor school attendance, low self esteem and the need to fill an emotional gap may lead to care leavers becoming young parents. The aftercare service is currently working with 27 young parents, some of them young fathers, encouraging them to continue in education, training or employment. The aftercare service supports the care leavers. If there are concerns about the child a social worker will be allocated. Care leavers who become parents typically have less support than their peers. This limited support allied with inadequate or unsuitable housing, limited money and poor budgeting skills, can affect their ability to provide adequate parenting. In addition, their lack of positive role models for parenting requires additional support through this stressful time.
36. For the young people leaving care identified with a complex, severe and profound disability physical, mental or learning difficulty, assessment and planning for transition to adults services starts at an early age. This group of young people are subject to assessment using the Fair Access to Services criteria and an extended community care assessment if appropriate. Early consultation and planning for these young people supported by transitions coordinators, ensures that clear pathways are available to education, social work and health team work to provide the level of support needed during the transition to adult services.
37. The importance of mental health support for care leavers is vital. They may have experienced chaotic young lives and the prospect of leaving care to live independently can be daunting. Young people with good emotional health are more likely to achieve at school, have better relationships with friends, take less unnecessary risks or behave in an antisocial way.
38. Young people leaving care can present emotional difficulties which were not apparent whilst in the care system, but become more evident as they move to live independently and this lack of emotional support may limit their resilience to meet difficulties of independent living resulting in problems when dealing with the additional pressures they face. Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHs), supports young people in the care systems where there are concerns about their emotional well-being or mental health. CAMHs use interventions from a range of clinicians which can include individual therapeutic work or consultation with the workers involved with the child. This support is available until age 18 and although these young people are assisted by the Aftercare team there is a lack of specialist mental health support as they do not satisfy the criteria for adult services. Some young people have emotional needs which are not mental illness and would benefit from short term intervention to enhance their emotional wellbeing which could help build resilience to living independently. Individuals with low level needs or fluctuating needs cannot be assessed by adult services until they reach 18 currently have their needs met through the provision of information and signposting. Referrals can be made through the Customer Care Centre which provides advice and guidance and can lead to an assessment under the Fair Access to Care Services to determine eligibility for support. Local authorities decide according to resources the level of eligible need required: critical, substantial, moderate or low and as

this group of young people would be considered as moderate or low and would not be eligible for support. We consider that using the Customer Care Centre is not an appropriate route for this group of vulnerable young people and they should have access to additional support which may prevent some potential problems in later life. Consideration needs to be given to the suitability of the criteria and pathway to services for this group of young people. We feel that a specialist worker should be identified who could help support emotional wellbeing for this group of vulnerable young people.

Recommendation

Consideration should be given to additional specialist emotional mental health support being made available for those vulnerable care leavers who do not meet the criteria for adult services.

Practical Skills needed to prepare to live independently

39. Care leavers attend Skills for Independence course which can include the basic skills needed to live in their own accommodation.
40. Personal advisors work with care leavers to prepare them for independent living. This can be done on an individual basis or as a group activity. Advice about cooking and healthy eating, budgeting, shopping, taking out contracts and bank accounts are included in the support package available for these young people. Once living independently this support is still accessible and personal advisors are available to assist young people who need it. Some care leavers require more support than others. Those living in a supported lodging scheme with foster carers have access to this support, but living in a home setting reduces the need for this. Young people living in accommodation commissioned by the supporting people programme may receive this support as part of their accommodation package.

What happens at 18?

41. We recognise that this group of vulnerable people not only have to live independently earlier than other young people but many have less education and life skills which equip them for this transition. They are less likely to be employed and then have a higher level of dependency on welfare benefits. This group of young people are prone to emotional health problems and nationally a disproportionate number of the prison population have been in care. This suggests that the care system and the transition into adulthood was not successful for a group of young care leavers.
42. We discussed this with care leavers and they were happy with the support they were currently receiving from the aftercare service. However, how successful the processes are in preparing young people for the future is difficult to assess. If a local authority loses touch with a care leaver it must take steps to re establish contact with the young person. However, some young people do not wish to have ongoing support and as adults this right has to be respected. Data for outcomes for the education, employment and training and accommodation placements is monitored at age 19. How many young people make a successful transition to adulthood is difficult to

measure. We consider that to be able to gauge the success of the looked after children and aftercares services more detailed monitoring of care leavers, and their eventual outcomes, would provide evidence of the success, or not, of the current procedures this could be used for future service planning.

Recommendation

A system to monitor the key outcomes for care leavers at the point of case closure be implemented to be used to inform policy for looked after children.

Summary of Recommendations

- 1. Consideration be given to funding care leavers who have their welfare benefits removed if they continue in education. The County Council should continue to fund care leavers who extend their education or training beyond 19.**
- 2. Children in care and care leavers should have access to a range of employability opportunities within the County Council:**
 - including work inspiration events, taster events and priority for work experience opportunities**
 - priority for places on any future corporate scheme for apprenticeships**
 - a guaranteed interview for any job for which they have the appropriate qualifications.**

In addition contractors for County Council services should be encouraged to offer employability opportunities in line with this commitment.

- 3. The framework contract for the provision of supported accommodation includes accommodation which will provide the appropriate level of support needed by care leavers with low level or fluctuating mental and emotional needs.**
- 4. Analysis is undertaken of the scale and impact of the Southwark Judgment on Children's Services.**
- 5. Further examination to identify that the 16 and 17 year old new entrants to the looked after system are receiving the support they need.**
- 6. Consideration should be given to additional specialist emotional mental health support being made available for those vulnerable care leavers who do not meet the criteria for adult services.**

- 7. A system to monitor the key outcomes for care leavers at the point of case closure be implemented to be used to inform policy for looked after children.**

What happens next?

This report and the recommendations will be presented to Cabinet. A response from the Portfolio Holder will be expected by the Health and Wellbeing Committee within two months. Recommendations will then be monitored by the Committee until a recommendation has been implemented unless there are reasons why it may not be possible to take it forward.



Contacting us

email	helen.lee@nottscc.gov.uk
phone	0115 977 2258
fax	0115 977 3030
post	Scrutiny Team, Chief Execs, County Hall, West Bridgford, Nottingham, NG2 7QP
internet	www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/scrutiny
published	April 2010