

**16 September 2013****Agenda Item: 8**

## **REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE**

### **LEAVING CARE SERVICE REVIEW**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the re-structure of Leaving Care Services in Nottinghamshire and the deletion of the Supported Accommodation Officer post within the Leaving Care Service.

#### **Information and Advice**

2. The provision of an advice and assistance service to young people aged 16 to 25 who are leaving the care of the Local Authority is enshrined in legislation. The Local Authority has a duty to ensure that eligible young people have a named personal adviser who is responsible for co-ordinating a Pathway Plan which sets out the young person's goals and the services needed to help them achieve these as they prepare for adulthood and begin independent lives.
3. The focus of this support is to help care leavers maximise their employability through access to appropriate education and training, to find and sustain safe, stable and affordable accommodation and to ensure that care leavers have a named adult who they can turn to for advice and guidance when needed.
4. The support offered through our Leaving Care Service includes a named personal adviser, financial help with further and higher education (fees, travel and accommodation and resources such as books and equipment), help with benefits and meeting Job Centre Plus requirements, finding and sustaining appropriate training and education, access to health care, finding appropriate accommodation (whether social housing or private tenancies) and financial support to set up a first home, a Staying Put Scheme that allows young people to stay with foster carers post 18 years, and help with independent living skills.
5. There are currently 350 young people aged 16 to 25 years who are eligible for this service, with approximately 100 looked after children (LAC) aged 16 and 17 years and 250 over 18 years.

#### **Service Review**

6. As part of the Children's Social Care Transformation agenda, the Leaving Care Service was reviewed between January and March 2013 to ensure that it continued to meet the needs of Nottinghamshire's Looked After Children and Care Leaver population in light of

the newly formed Throughcare Service. The review also considered the challenge of continued budget pressures by focusing on the efficient use of resources. As the service currently includes qualified and unqualified staff the review looked at whether these staff groups could be used more effectively. The Department for Education confirmed that the statutory role of personal adviser could be undertaken by the social worker responsible for the looked after child's case. Prior to this, case law had dictated that the roles were separate and that 16 and 17 year old looked after children had to have both a social worker and a personal adviser.

7. The review included care leaver consultation, including the Children in Care Council and groups of care leavers; shadowing of Leaving Care staff in order to understand the role and consultation with staff and team managers within the Leaving Care Service. Unions have been kept informed throughout and attended staff meetings.
8. The review identified that the number of care leavers is increasing year on year in line with the County's growing population of looked after children and there will be a net increase of 82 cases for the service over the next 12 months.
9. Importantly duplication of resources was identified as an issue as 114 young people had an allocated qualified social worker from the Looked After Children (LAC) Service and a personal adviser from the Leaving Care Team. This duplication resulted in an inefficient use of social work resource which could be better utilised to meet growing demand.
10. Specialist roles within the Leaving Care Service (i.e. Education and Training Officers and Supported Accommodation Officer) were ill defined and not used consistently across the County. There was also duplication with some of the services offered by Targeted Support in relation to accommodation.
11. Young people themselves were confused by the roles of workers and wanted fewer changes of social worker.

## **Summary of Changes**

12. The Leaving Care Service will become a non social work qualified 18 years plus service. It will comprise 13.2 fte Personal Advisers and 1.6 fte Team Managers. There will be no decrease in staffing for this service as caseloads are expected to rise over the next few years.
13. The remaining 8.4 fte qualified Social Workers and a 0.8 fte Leaving Care Team Manager will transfer to the LAC Service. This group of staff will continue to work primarily with older looked after young people (15 years plus) and will take a lead role in Pathway Planning for this age group. It is expected that leaving care social workers, with their expertise with this age group, will improve the quality of planning for children as they make plans to exit care at 18 years.
14. Cases will stay with the LAC Service until the young person reaches 18 years old or until they are no longer looked after. If the young person is entitled to a personal adviser then the LAC social worker will fulfil this role in addition to managing the young person's care and pathway planning. At 18 years old the case will transfer to the Leaving Care Service for ongoing advice and assistance.

15. Given the importance of education and training for a young person's economic future and employability, the existing Education and Training Officers will remain, however their job descriptions have been revised to focus on improving education and training planning for 16 to 18 year old looked after children and maximising education and employment opportunities for care leavers.
16. It is proposed that the role of the Supported Accommodation Officer is deleted. This is not a statutory role and duplicates the role of the Targeted Support Service which provides a service in relation to supported accommodation for young people.

### **Other Options Considered**

17. Two alternative options were considered. The first was to do nothing and retain the leaving care service in its present form. This was rejected due to the reasons identified above in that the current model does not provide an efficient use of resources in a climate of increasing demand.
18. The second option considered was that of establishing a new 16 plus service. This would have sat alongside the current LAC service and introduced another transfer point in the journey of a looked after child. This option was rejected following consultation with young people themselves and concerns that this model could not meet the level of demand without additional resources.

### **Reason/s for Recommendation/s**

19. The new structure of the Leaving Care Service in Nottinghamshire underlines Nottinghamshire County Council's commitment to young people who are and have been in its care, and will ensure that our services to this group of young people continue to meet their needs amid increasing demand.

### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

20. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, the public sector equality duty, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

### **Implications for Service Users**

21. Looked After Children and Care Leavers will benefit from continuity of social worker and clear commitment from the County Council to ensure young people are not discharged from care until they are 18 years old.

### **Human Resources Implications**

22. The current Supported Accommodation Officer postholder will be re-deployed into a vacant Personal Adviser post.

## **Financial Implications**

23. Deletion of the Accommodation Officer post (Grade 4, 0.6fte) will result in a budget saving of £11,000 which will contribute to alleviating the budget pressures anticipated by the Authority for 2014-15. The transfer of other posts from Leaving Care to Looked After teams will have no financial implications.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

That:

- 1) the re-structure of the Leaving Care Service be approved.
- 2) the deletion of the Supported Accommodation Officer post be approved.

**Steve Edwards**  
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## **Constitutional Comments (LM 02/08/13)**

24. The Children and Young People's Committee has delegated authority to approve the recommendations in the report.

## **Financial Comments (KLA 06/08/13)**

25. The financial implications of the report are set out in paragraph 23 above.

## **Background Papers and Published Documents**

None.

## **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

All.

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