

### **1. The Aftercare Service**

- 1.1 The Aftercare Service provides a practical advice and assistance service for care leavers through the provision of an allocated named Personal Adviser. The Personal Adviser co-ordinates and contributes to a package of support individually tailored to meet a young person's needs as they make the transition to adulthood – the Pathway Plan.
- 1.2 This Plan sets out the young person's goals in key areas such as accommodation, finance, education and employment, practical and emotional support and health, the means by which these goals will be achieved, and who needs to do what and when. The Plan is reviewed from the age of 16 by the Independent Reviewing Officers as part of the review of looked after arrangements for children in care. Once the young person leaves care the Plan is reviewed by Aftercare staff. Regular review ensures that the plan is on track, that any changes can be made and progress monitored.
- 1.3. There are three teams of Aftercare staff across the County. There are 30 support staff in total made up of 9 qualified Social Workers , 13 unqualified staff, 3 Education , Employment and Training Advisers, an Accommodation Adviser, 3 Team Managers (30 hours per week) and a Service Manager(22 hours per week). 300 young people are currently receiving services. This number represents a diverse group of young people and includes approximately 50 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People.

### **2. The Transition from Care to Independence**

- 2.1. Children and young people come into care for a host of reasons including parental bereavement, parents being unwilling or unable to care, family breakdown or removal due to abusive or neglectful parenting. Pre care experiences can have long term consequences for children and young people in relation to emotional, social and behavioural development. These experiences are often compounded during teenage years at the time when young people need to be developing skills which are vital to becoming a competent adult.
- 2.2. Young people in care are likely to leave home younger, and have more abrupt transitions to adulthood than their peers. Most other young people remain in their family home and do not claim benefits at 18, especially if they are in Further Education. The current system compels care leavers to. Many are expected to live independently and manage their own income and household as soon as they reach legal adulthood, or claim housing benefit to part fund continuing placements with former foster carers.
- 2.3. A key aim of the Children Leaving Care Act 2000 is to delay young people's move from care to independent living until they are ready and prepared. Making the transition from care to independence will be more successful where young people are over 18, have had positive and stable carers, have achievable education and employment goals, have access to affordable, safe and stable accommodation, are emotionally resilient and have positive support networks.

- 2.4 Young people who leave foster care or residential placements before the age of 18 do so for a variety of reasons, including wanting to have more independence, or because of placement breakdown. Typically, this group is the most challenging. They are more likely to be engaging in risky behaviours, are not settled in school or training, are pushing boundaries and are difficult to manage in a small group or family setting. Progress has been made within the Local Authority over the last ten years in delaying the discharge of young people from care too early. Of the current group of 246 16 to 24 yr old care leavers, only 17 are aged 16 or 17.

### **3. Accommodation**

- 3.1. National Indicator 147 measures whether young people are deemed to be in suitable accommodation at age 19. Whilst our achievements are good in this area (95% in 2009), the provision of appropriate accommodation is a continuing challenge. The identification of appropriate accommodation, supporting young people with applications and interviews, providing short term emergency accommodation pending allocation and the provision of tenancy support to prevent evictions is a major aspect of the Personal Adviser role.

#### **3.2. Under 18 s**

This small number of care leavers (17) is often the most challenging as outlined above. The Local Authority has a duty to provide accommodation and finance for young people termed "relevant" care leavers (16 and 17 yr old care leavers) and placements are provided in a variety of semi independent accommodation projects provided by registered social landlords and the private sector. One of the key challenges is preventing the breakdown of these placements due to unacceptable behaviour. To this end a Good Practice Protocol is in place to guide staff.

- 3.3. There is variable accommodation provision across the county and there has been a growth in private companies providing accommodation with floating support for young people. With the constriction of social housing, we have begun to rely increasingly on the largely unregulated private sector. For example, the majority of the Asylum Seeking 16 to 17 year olds are placed in Nottingham with a private provider offering shared housing with floating support from key workers. This works well with this group of young people who are able to develop culturally appropriate links, form friendships with others who have had similar experiences and are highly motivated to achieve independence.
- 3.4. It is inevitable that some young people will need urgent and immediate accommodation. One of the main challenges facing the Aftercare service is identifying appropriate immediate access accommodation. This type of provision is limited in the county and demand exceeds supply. Both District Councils and the Aftercare Team are reliant on private sector hoteliers to provide immediate access short term accommodation. In order to raise standards in this sector, the Aftercare Team are drawing up a list of Approved Providers whose facilities have met certain requirements. This is to ensure that young people's needs can be appropriately met and the quality of accommodation monitored.

#### **3.5. Over 18s**

The Team works with seven District Councils. Whilst most have signed up to a county wide protocol which aims to support smooth transitions from care to council tenancy there are still variations in how well this works. There are examples of excellent practise where District Councils have identified properties for young people in advance of their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday allowing young people to stay in foster placements while they decorate

and equip the property before fully moving in. There are also examples of Councils being reluctant to accept housing applications prior to age 18.

- 3.6. Young people often choose the private rented sector particularly where the market is buoyant and provides more choice. The Team has built up positive relationships with estate agents and private landlords which have been key to supporting young people in achieving and maintaining tenancies of their own.
- 3.7. A key factor in achieving security of tenure is affordability. Many young people are low waged or reliant on state benefits (including those in further education) and need support in maintaining rent payments. Individual financial support packages are provided to young people, following assessments of need, to support accommodation stability. These are outlined in the financial policy for care leavers.
- 3.8. Where young people wish to remain with foster carers to complete a programme of education, our policies support this. In addition, placements can be converted to Supported Lodgings so that young people can remain with foster carers until they are ready to leave.

#### **4. Education and Employment**

- 4.1. Equipping young people with the skills and qualifications necessary to support them in the job market is a significant challenge. Many young people in the care system have experienced a poor start with regard to education and learning and are from families where unemployment and reliance on the benefit system is long standing and entrenched. Many care leavers experience difficulties in learning due to emotional or behavioural barriers.
- 4.2. Opportunities are further limited due to the current economic downturn and the pressure on training providers and colleges to offer limited places to students who have the potential to achieve set targets. For example Castle College in Nottingham has now closed and the Entry to Employment Scheme which historically has supported young people to develop basic skills will now be focusing on attainment requiring progression within set timescales. This may disadvantage those young people who require intensive and flexible individual support.
- 4.3. The 3 Education and Employment Advisers provide advice and guidance to care leavers focusing on those who are not currently engaged in activity and need extra support. They assist young people in setting their targets, set up work experience opportunities, offer support with applications and interviews and to maintain young people in Further and Higher education. The financial policy for care leavers aims to reduce the impact of student debt and provides incentives for young people to remain in education, training or employment.

#### **5. Health and Emotional Support**

- 5.1. Many young people do not prioritise their health needs and many need support to engage in preventative health measures and in accessing primary and specialist health care. All young people are assisted in registering with GP, dentist and optician where needed. Young people are offered support in accessing young people-friendly services, particularly regarding sexual health, substance misuse and counselling services.
- 5.2. Some young people can experience more significant health issues notably depression and need support in accessing specialist health care through GP accessed adult mental health services.

- 5.3. Young people leaving care with substantial and significant disabilities usually have clear and rigorous transitions plans to take their support through seamlessly from children's services to adult care through the transitions process for disabled children.
- 5.4. There is a significant number of young people whose difficulties are seen as behavioural and emotional and who do not meet the criteria for adult services. These young people clearly need intensive packages of support in order to live independently.

## **6. Practical Skills and Preparation for Independence**

- 6.1. All young people aged 16 plus in the care system should have access to a named Personal Adviser who will support their preparation for independence. Various practical tools are used to support this work and it is delivered through individual work with young people, group work or through foster carers or residential care staff.
- 6.2. Whilst equipping young people with practical skills such as cooking and shopping is straightforward for most, other skills such as problem solving, negotiation and decision making are more difficult to develop. However these skills are fundamental in enabling young people to make the transition to adulthood and independence. The very nature of being in care often acts as a barrier for some young people to develop these essential life skills. Foster carers and social workers have access to training led by Aftercare staff to support their work in this area.
- 6.3. Young people come into care at different ages and for different reasons. Complex birth family relationships will be a feature for them all, with many maintaining a level of contact and some returning to live with family. A major part of preparation for adult life is helping young people develop ways to manage these ongoing relationships.

## **7. Ongoing Support**

- 7.1. Support is provided by the Aftercare Team until care leavers reach age 21 or 24 if enrolled on a programme of Higher Education.
- 7.2. The Aftercare policy supports ongoing support from foster carers when young people leave placements.

## **8. Current and Future Challenges**

- 8.1. The House of Lords judgement in May 2009 R(G) v Southwark gives legal clarification concerning the accommodation of homeless and vulnerable 16 and 17 yr olds. This ruling will lead to greater numbers of these young people, previously dealt with through housing legislation and accommodated by housing authorities, becoming looked after by this Department. This will lead to greater numbers being eligible for support as care leavers and increased demand for Personal Adviser support and financial support. There is no analysis available currently regarding predicted demand.
- 8.2. There has been a large increase in the number of Looked After Children in Nottinghamshire over the past 12 months. It is predicted that this will lead to a rise in the number of young people being entitled to receive After Care Services, but that this may take 2-5 years.

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