

16 April 2024**Agenda Item: 11****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, HELP, PROTECTION AND CARE****CARE LEAVERS ANNUAL REPORT****Purpose of the Report**

1. To report on the provision, services and outcomes for those young people who have been looked after by Nottinghamshire between the ages of 18 - 24 and identified as care leavers receiving support from the Leaving Care Service.

Information

2. The Looked After Children and Leaving Care Service sits within Help, Protection and Care Division within Nottinghamshire County Council. The teams are overseen by a Group Manager and two Service Managers. The Leaving Care Service consists of three teams covering geographical areas: South, North and Central, and the 21 Plus team. The Service also has an Achievement Service which provides information and advice about training, education and work opportunities. The Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) Team offers a more dedicated and specialist service to UASC under the age of 18 and also to UASC care leavers aged over 18.
3. There are 4 FTE Team Managers overseeing 44 FTE posts including Personal Advisers, Achievement Advisers, 21Plus Personal Advisers, Transitional Personal Advisers and a Homelessness Prevention Personal Adviser. The service has recently increased the number of Personal Advisers so that young people can have an identified allocated Personal Adviser from the age of 16½ to help better prepare them in their journey to adulthood.
4. At the end of February 2024, there were 425 care leavers aged 18 - 21 receiving support from the Leaving Care Service with an identified allocated Personal Adviser. A total of 160 looked after young people aged 16-17 years had an allocated Leaving Care Personal Adviser. There were 386 care leavers over 21 years accessing support from the 21Plus Service and 78 young people who are classed as 'Qualifying' care leavers under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000; they do not have an allocated Personal Adviser, but can access support, advice and guidance from the Leaving Care Service when needed. Qualifying care leavers can also access elements of the Local Offer for Care Leavers.
5. Of the 425 care leavers aged 18 - 21 years, 231 (54.3%) identify as male, 192 (45.1%) identify as female and 2 (0.3%) identify as gender fluid. Within the service, 360 (84.7%)

care leavers identify their main ethnicity as being White, 38 (8.9%) young people identify as being mixed race, 6 (1.4%) young people identify as being Black, 10 (2.4%) young people identify as Asian, and 11 (2.6%) young people identify as being 'other'.

6. Of the 425 care leavers aged 18 - 21 years, 349 (84.7%) identify their current address as being in Nottingham City or one of the seven district/borough councils of Nottinghamshire. This number increases to 373 (87.7%) young people identifying their address as within the East Midlands conurbations.
7. The role of a leaving care personal advisor is to provide advice (including practical advice), assistance and emotional support. The aim of leaving care services is to support care leavers so that they can experience a smooth transition and go on to live successful independent lives. Each care leaver will reach that point at a different age.
8. 'Stable Homes, Built on Love: strategy and consultation' is the government's plan for how we make children's social care work better. Ambition 4 is to: Make care better for children in care and care leavers and states: *"If you are in care your local authority is your 'corporate parent'. This means they should act like any loving parent would and provide you with the best possible support and care. If you are leaving care, you should continue to feel safe and loved"*.
9. Support from a personal advisor is like what a parent would provide such as encouragement to access emotional support, if needed, such as counselling or input from mental health services, celebrating success, encouragement to apply for jobs or to consider further education, advice on budgeting, managing money, advocating for example if the young person has wrongly accrued debts, and support to apply for benefits. It could be practical support like helping to put together furniture. Our young people should feel they are not on their own.
10. If a care leaver starts a college course or university the more support that is provided in the first term means they are more likely to continue attending and to achieve.
11. The Stable Homes, Built on Love strategy also increased the amount of money young people get when they leave care to a minimum of £3,000 from April 2023. This is known as their Home Establishment Grant. A key role for the personal advisor is supporting a care leaver in setting up their first independent home. The home establishment grant is to enable care leavers to purchase essentials (such as furniture, white goods and carpets/curtains) when they move into their first home.
12. The Local Authority is required to send information to the Department for Education on an annual basis. Local Authorities have to provide information such as the numbers of care leavers that the Local Authority is 'in-touch' with, how many young people are in employment, education and/or training (EET) and how many are in suitable accommodation.
13. In 2022-2023, Nottinghamshire County Council identified that they were in touch with 97% of care leavers aged 17-18 years (96% is the national average), and 94% of care leavers aged 19 - 21 years (94% is the national average), as well as 89% of those care leavers aged 21Plus (no national average benchmark).

14. In 2022-2023, the Local Authority identified 66% of 17 - 18 year-olds being in employment, education and/or training compared with 62% for statistical neighbours and 66% being the national average. 53% of 19 - 21-year-olds were identified as in employment, education and/or training which is also in-line with the national average.
15. In terms of suitable accommodation for care leavers, Nottinghamshire County Council has commissioned supported accommodation provision for young people aged 16 - 25 years. As part of the new Staying Close agenda, a co-production worker is in post to shape the provision who is working on the recruitment of a multi-disciplinary team to provide support to young people living in supported accommodation. This team will be able to provide emotional and mental health support as well as drug and alcohol support. In addition, through some grant funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the Leaving Care Service has access to Care Leaver Emergency Accommodation for those young people that are at risk of homelessness. This accommodation offers wrap-around support for 12 weeks to ensure that these young people have the right support in place at the right time. Working alongside the seven district/borough councils and other multi-agency support, the young person is then able to move back into their own tenancy or move to supported accommodation provision.
16. In 2022-2023, 90% of 17 - 18 year-olds, and 89% of 19 - 21 year-olds were identified as being in suitable accommodation. Of the 19 - 21-year-olds, 3% were identified as being in custody and 4% in other accommodation which would include houses of multiple occupancy. Houses of multiple occupancy, which are classed as unsuitable accommodation, include young people at university who are choosing to house-share or live in halls of residence accommodation.

Pathway Plans

17. Looked after children should have a Pathway Plan by the time they are 16¼ years of age. From 18 years the completion of the young person's Pathway Plan is the responsibility of their Personal Adviser and it is reviewed every six months or earlier if appropriate. As of March 2024, the Leaving Care Service had completed and reviewed 98% of Pathway Plans within timescales.

Local Offer for Care Leavers

18. Since September 2023, the Leaving Care Service has been undertaking a review of the Local Offer for Care Leavers, which has involved gaining the views of care leavers through electronic surveys, focus-groups and one-to-one discussions with young people. This review has also taken into consideration Ofsted's new Inspection of Local Authorities Children's Services framework as well as good practice from other East Midlands local authority partners, reflection from other leaving care services within the UK and from learning by participating in the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum run by Catch 22.
19. The review of the Local Offer has led to the production of a newly revised Local Offer for Care Leavers, as well as an updated Achievement Offer (employment, education and/or training), as well as extended offers focused on young people in/or leaving custody, young people identifying as being parents or parents to be, young people seeking asylum, and those who are accessing 21Plus support. The updated Local Offers were launched at the

end of March 2024 with printed versions available to young people, web and electronic versions (available for download) from www.nottshelpyourself.org.uk, and updated information on the Notts Next Steps (Care Leaver App) on mobile phone and electronic devices. The consultations and working together on the updated and new Local Offers have been across services and organisations and have included the Children in Care Council, Strengths-Based Practice Team, Youth Justice Service, Probation Services and health colleagues.

Young People's Achievements and Feedback

20. The Leaving Care Service celebrates the achievements and success of care leavers and this is often fed into the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Partnership Board. A few examples of feedback and achievements are as follows:
- *One young person had his passing out parade for the Army and is now joining the Irish Guards*
 - *One care leaver had support from the Achievement Service and gained their first part time job, they previously did not take up employment as they would not leave their house.*
 - *A 21Plus Care Leaver enrolled at University on MBChB Medicine 4th year for 22/23 and has been supported to go to New Zealand on her elective medical placement for 3 months. The young person said "I just want to say a massive thank you to you both for helping me arrange this elective, it's a massive thing for me and I'm really appreciative for all your input and help. I honestly don't think I could have done it without you both. So thank you very much!"*
 - *A care leaver attended one of the Achievement Service's Employability Days with Boots PLC, and they loved the atmosphere and culture when visiting there and so applied for a job and is now working there!*
 - *A care leaver got a job at a children's home in Nottinghamshire. He is really excited to be able to, "give back to the system that raised me, and help some lost souls like myself." He got the job based on what he said about his experience in care and how he would help others.*
21. Positive comments were also received from agencies about our working together in the best interests of our care leavers. An example of this was from the Department of Work and Pensions who emailed management to say: *"Thank you to NCC [Nottinghamshire County Council] and Achievement Service, you've been brilliant whenever we get in touch, they will get back to us within 24 hours whether we call 21Plus or any of Leaving care service – really good, really helpful unlike some other areas we work with."*

Future Plans

22. The Leaving Care Service is working alongside Nottinghamshire NHS Trust and Barnardo's to provide 2.5 FTE wellbeing workers from Spring 2024, for care leavers and children seeking asylum. These workers will work alongside statutory mental health services, but target support to those young people that do not identify as being at the level

for adult services intervention or are transitioning from children's mental health services. They will offer consultation to the Personal Advisers so that they feel more confident to support young people with their emotional health and wellbeing.

23. The University of Bristol has been undertaking a study on the health of care leavers since 2020 and Nottinghamshire's Leaving Care Service has been part of this study. Identified as the 'Lift Study', this is now concluding by the end of Summer 2024. The researchers are now analysing the impact that specific health training and learning for Personal Advisers has had on the service that is offered to care leavers. Once the study is complete training sessions will be offered to workers within the Leaving Care Service.
24. As a result of a self-reflective audit in Leaving Care, neurodiversity training has been identified to take place in June 2024. The outcome of this training will be that some Personal Advisers will be identified as neurodiversity champions within Leaving Care. The champions will then support team members to identify individual needs (whether diagnosed or undiagnosed) so that Pathway Plans can be more meaningful and impactful.
25. Several workers within the Leaving Care Service recently met with an independent person as part of preparation for the Ofsted visit. Reflective discussions took place along with audits and individual discussions to identify areas of good practice and areas for improvement. The outcome of this work will be shared with the team shortly and plans can then be made for future workshops and reflective discussions.

Other Options Considered

26. To not bring this report to the Panel: this option is discounted because this report provides information that forms an important part of the Panel's remit in assisting the Council in fulfilling its legal corporate parenting duties and acting as an effective corporate parent.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

25. The report provides an opportunity for the Corporate Parenting Panel to consider any further actions arising from the information contained within the report.

Statutory and Policy Implications

27. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

28. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the Corporate Parenting Panel considers the annual report on Care Leavers and advises of any further assurance or activities required to provide the best possible outcomes to young people transitioning from care.

Amanda Collinson
Service Director, Help, Protection and Care

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Sophie Eadsforth
Group Manager, Looked After Children, Leaving Care, Children with Disabilities & Fostering
T: 0115 804 1211
E: sophie.eadsforth@nottsccl.gov.uk

Rachel Stimson
Service Manager, Looked After and Leaving Care Service
T: 0115 8043004
E: rachel.stimson1@nottsccl.gov.uk

Matt Wesson
Service Manager, Looked After and Leaving Care Service
T: 0115 8041514
E: matt.wesson@nottsccl.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments (GMG 28/03/24)

29. The report falls within the remit of the Corporate Parenting Panel for consideration under Section 7, Part 1, paragraph 36 on p.125 of the Council's Constitution.

Financial Comments (VC 04/04/24)

30. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected
All.

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