

24 June 2013**Agenda Item: 11****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE****LEAVING CARE SERVICE UPDATE****Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide an update on the Leaving Care Service, with particular reference to the review of the 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 and stable, 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, resources such as 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. The team currently comprises 13.1 fte Personal Advisers (unqualified staff), 8.4 fte Qualified Social Workers, 2.4 fte Team Managers and a 0.5 fte Children's Services Manager. In addition there are 3 fte Education, Employment and Training Advisers and a 0.6 fte Accommodation Officer. The service is currently split into three teams based across the County on locality boundaries.
6. 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

7. As part of the Children's Social Care Transformation agenda, the service was reviewed between January and March 2013 to ensure that it continued to meet the needs of the newly created Through Care Service for looked after children. 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.
8. The review was carried out by the Children's Social Care Transformation Team and 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
 - consultation with education advisers, a supported accommodation officer and team managers.

Headline Findings

9. The headline findings of the review were as follows:
 - the number of care leavers is increasing year on year in line with the County's growing population of looked after children
 - there will be a net increase of 82 cases for the service over the next 12 months
 - the average caseload for personal advisers is 16. Benchmarking against national provision revealed the national average is 22
 - 114 young people have an allocated qualified social worker from the Looked After Children (LAC) Service and a personal adviser from the Leaving Care Team.
 - the performance of LAC social workers in completing Pathway Plans for 16 and 17 year olds in care is unsatisfactory in terms of timescales, standard, and inclusion of young people's views
 - our education, employment and training rates are above the national average
 - young people were confused by the roles of workers but felt that personal advisers treated them like adults whereas social workers 'nagged' them
 - young people wanted fewer changes of social worker
 - for young people money and accommodation was more important than education
 - 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 long awaited clarity, 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.

Summary of Changes

10. The Leaving Care Service will move to become a non qualified 18+ service. It will comprise 13.1 fte Personal Advisers, 1.6 fte Team Managers and a 0.5 fte Children's Services Manager. There will be no decrease in personal adviser numbers for this service as caseloads are expected to rise over the next few years. The dis-establishment of the Supported Accommodation officer is in the process of being considered.
11. 8.4 fte Qualified Social Workers and a 0.8 fte Leaving Care Team Manager will transfer to the Looked after Children Service. This group of staff will continue to work primarily with the older looked after young people and will take a lead role in Pathway Planning for this age group although not exclusively. 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.
12. 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.
13. Given the importance of education and training for a young person's economic future and employability, it has been agreed that the Education and Training Officers will remain. Two workers will work in the Leaving Care Service and one in the LAC Service. These roles will 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. Job descriptions are being revised to maximise their input and expertise within the new structure.
14. Nottinghamshire Futures has confirmed that it will continue to second a worker to work with this age group within the service.

Other Options Considered

15. The report is for noting only.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

16. To update the Committee on the Leaving Care Service.

Statutory and Policy Implications

17. 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.

Equalities Implications

18. Due regard has been given to the Public Sector Equality Duty

RECOMMENDATION/S

1) That the update on the Leaving Care Service be noted.

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Constitutional Comments

19. As this report is for noting only, no Constitutional Comments are required.

Financial Comments (initials 12/06/13)

20. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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