

Overview and Scrutiny Review Social Services Select Committee

After Care Service

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Social Services Select Committee

Report of the After Care Study Group

Final Report of the After Care Study Group

Introduction

1. This report presents the findings of the Social Services Select Committee review of the County Council's After Care Service.

Background

2. The Social Services Select Committee formed a Study Group on 21 December 2004 to examine issues associated with the After Care services for young people as follows:
 - Placing and sustaining young people in education, training and employment
 - Linkages with other County Council Departments to maximise the role they might play in enhancing the life chances of care leavers
 - Partnerships with outside agencies including housing, Supporting People and the Police
3. The Study Group received a presentation from the Locality Manager Newark and Bassetlaw on 4 April 2005. The presentation included information on the following:
 - The Authority's responsibility to support those leaving care up to the age of 21 and the power to support up to the age of 25.
 - Service size: the After Care Service comprises: 2 team managers, 6.5 FTE social workers, 3 training officers and 0.5 supported lodging worker.
 - The After Care Service provides financial grants (e.g. to assist with accommodation). The total expenditure is approximately £1.6 million. The Service is currently working with approximately 160 people.
 - The need for the service to be pro-active in keeping in touch with young people in order to meet the challenging target of being in touch with 90% of care leavers on their nineteenth birthday.
 - The significant Service Level Agreements with NCH and NACRO.

4. The Study Group identified the need to look more closely at the following issues:
 - County Council employment policy as it relates to the employment of care leavers
 - Service Level Agreements (NACRO and NCH) and how these are being met
 - Young people after 19 (when they have passed the performance indicator)
 - Use of “Bed and Breakfast” accommodation
 - The responsibility of individual district councils
5. At the meeting of the Social Services Select Committee on 14 June 2005, Members agreed to reconstitute the After Care Study Group following the County Council elections. Councillors Carroll, Lally and Lonergan were appointed to the Study Group, which has met on 20 September 2005, 24 October 2005, 14 November 2005, 13 December 2005 and 2 May 2006.
6. The Study Group, whilst considering all the issues identified spent significant time considering the Personal Adviser Service, Service Level Agreements with NACRO and NCH.

After Care Service

Service Performance

7. The Study Group considered the performance of the After Care Service against national performance indicators measuring the proportion of young people who at age 19 are:
- In appropriate accommodation
 - In education, employment or training
 - In touch with the After Care service
8. The recent performance regarding these indicators is set out below:

Indicator	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06 (target)
The % of young people at age 19 who were in education, training or employment, and were looked after in their 17 th year (aged 16).	26.5%	57.1%	75.0%	82% (80.0%)*
The % of those young people who were looked after on 1 st April in their 17 th year (aged 16), who had regular contact with the Social Services Department until their 19 th birthday.	66.7%	90.0%	80.0%	90% (90.0%)
The proportion of children who were looked after on 1 st April in their 17 th year (aged 16+), who were known to have suitable accommodation.	60.6%	76.7%	80.0%	85.3% (90.0%)

*Performance Indicator is a PSA Stretch Target.

9. The Study Group also considered feedback from two consultation events held with care leavers in June 2005, which whilst raising some issues for improvement generally reflected positively on the service.

County Council Employment

10. The Study Group considered methods for the County Council to support care leavers to find employment with the Authority. They heard that positive links were already being made through the After Care Training Officers and that the responses from County Council services were usually constructive. The Study Group concluded that any policy changes to further advantage care leavers would be difficult to reconcile with equal opportunities policies and unlikely to make any significant difference.

Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

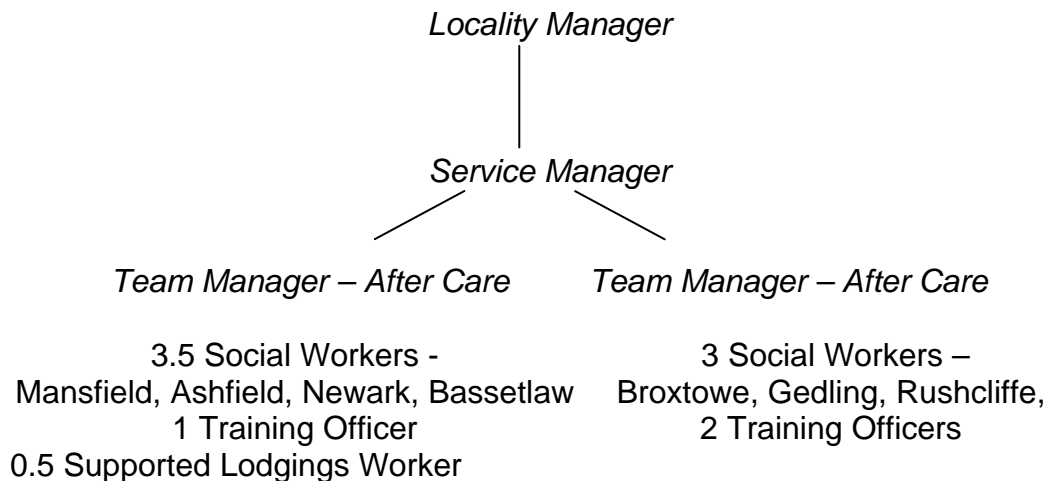
11. The Study Group considered information on the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation and the circumstances requiring its use.
12. Since 2002 the County Council has shown improvement on the use of suitable accommodation
13. The Study Group accepted that in some cases, individual circumstances might make the use of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation unavoidable for some young people.

Personal Adviser Service

Background

14. In 2002, following a competitive tendering process, the Social Services Department commissioned NCH Action for Children and NACRO to provide Personal Adviser Services for Care Leavers in Nottinghamshire. Similar Service Level Agreements were reached with each provider. NACRO cover Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe, Newark & Sherwood and Bassetlaw at a cost of £419,000 p.a. NCH covers Mansfield and Ashfield at a cost of £209,000 p.a. The total cost is therefore £628,000 p.a.
15. The contracts with NCH Action for Children and NACRO are due to expire in December 2007.
16. Each young person looked after by the Authority should have had an individual Pathway Plan developed by the time they are 16. This plan sets out what needs to be done in order to prepare the young person for adulthood. It covers areas such as personal support, accommodation, employment and education, practical and life skills and is reviewed every six months.
17. The key role of the Personal Adviser is to assist in the delivery of the Pathway Plan, supporting the young person and taking on specific tasks identified in the Plan. This is done in conjunction with the After Care Social Worker (employed by the Social Services Department) who usually retains case responsibility. Personal Advisers also undertake group work and activities with care leavers.
18. When originally commissioned it was envisaged that these arrangements would offer the following advantages:
 - Building on the established experience of NCH who had been working with young people in Nottinghamshire for some years.
 - Skill mix with the unqualified Personal Advisers having skills in direct work which complemented that of qualified Social Workers.
 - An element of service independence and advocacy for care leavers.
19. In 2003/04 the Department's After Care service was restructured with After Care Social Workers previously based in Locality Looked After Teams brought together into one Countywide After Care Team with dedicated, specialist line management. These new arrangements have enabled a more focussed and coherent approach to be taken to the oversight of these Service Level Agreements and their operation.

20. After Care services in Nottinghamshire are arranged as a countywide service with local bases as follows:



Issues with Current Arrangements

21. The Study Group took evidence from the Locality Manager with responsibility for After care Services and an After Care Worker and identified a number of difficulties with the current arrangements.
22. The restructure to the After Care Service has enabled a more focussed and coherent approach to be taken to the oversight of the Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and their operation. A number of consistent difficulties have been highlighted through this process.
23. The Service Level Agreements drawn up as part of the original tendering process have proved insufficiently specific about the services to be provided and how these are to be monitored.
24. A number of problems are being experienced with the provision of Personal Adviser services. These include:
- Difficulties in agreeing operational and casework priorities.
 - Services being unavailable.
 - Services being withdrawn without consultation or agreement.
25. Given the significant investment in these services it is not currently possible to evidence that the outputs being delivered represent good value for money.
26. The roles of the After Care Social Worker and Personal Adviser are currently not sufficiently distinct to avoid duplication and demarcation disputes.
27. Having two staffing structures creates management diseconomies. Each service needs a management structure and considerable work is required liaising between managers.
28. Underpinning these problems is a fundamental flaw in the current arrangements. It is not considered possible or desirable to clearly separate the Social Worker and Personal Adviser functions. Difficulties also arise from

working to separate management and organisational structures, leading to duplication, confusion, conflict and frustration as well as management diseconomies.

Future Options

29. The Study Group considered that some of the problems described could be improved by having tighter Service Level Agreements, clearer monitoring arrangements and better relationships with the providers.
30. The Study Group agreed however that a single management structure would improve the ability to deploy resources most effectively, maximise flexibility and work to agreed priorities. The Study Group accepted that the development of a specialist After Care service in-house brought the limitations of the current arrangements into focus. It is argued they are no longer fit for purpose and represent an unnecessary, ineffective compromise between an in-house service or completely outsourced service both of which would be preferable.
31. Based on this the Study Group considered three options:

Option A	Seek to renegotiate the contracts and SLAs
Option B	Tender for an outsourced Personal Adviser Service from one supplier
Option C	Establish an internal Personal Adviser Service

Option A - Seek to renegotiate the contracts and SLAs

32. Some of the problems described above could be improved by having tighter Service Level Agreements, clearer monitoring arrangements and better relationships with the providers.
33. This option would not address the issues of duplication related to separating the Social Worker and Personal Adviser functions or the current management diseconomies.
34. The Study Group considered that an early conclusion of the current contracts would allow for a more effective service to be provided sooner.

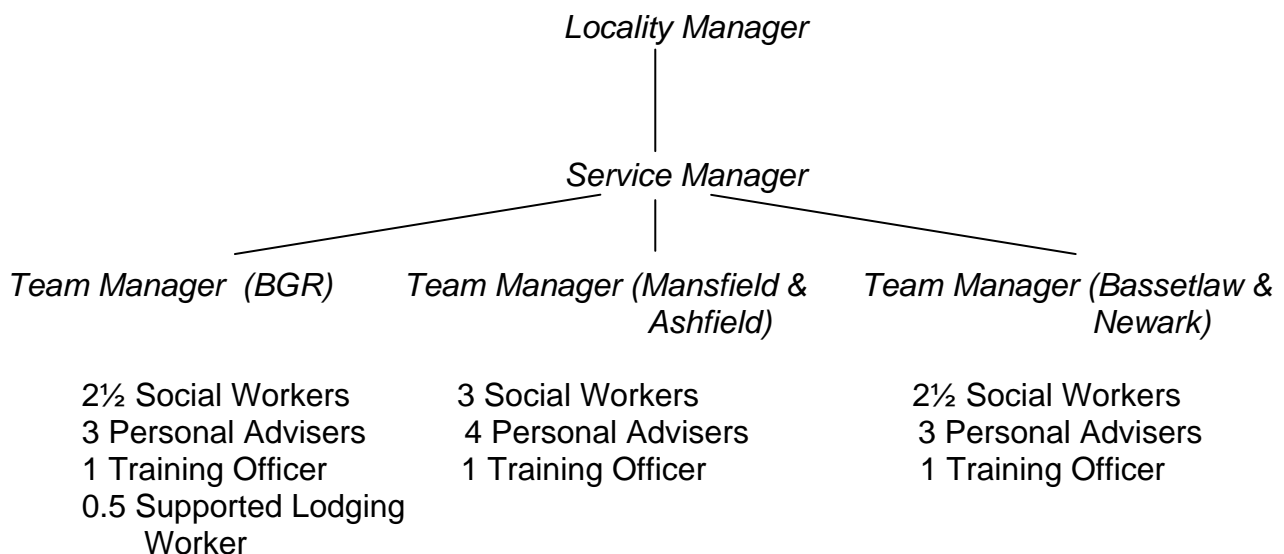
Option B - Tender for an outsourced Personal Adviser Service from one supplier

35. The current difficulties could be limited by contracting the provision of Personal Adviser services from one provider for a county wide service rather than the current arrangements of two providers. A new contract would reflect operational and casework priorities.
36. An outsourced service provides greater service independence, however the Study Group noted that it also brings the following disadvantages
 - Limited control over service delivery and quality.
 - Contract management costs for the County Council in addition to the cost of the Service

- The Social Worker and Personal Adviser roles would continue to be separated, working to different organisations and potentially different priorities.
37. The Study Group considered evidence that raised concerns at the availability of possible providers. Members noted that the previous tendering process resulted in the current position of two different providers as neither could provide a Countywide service.

Option C - In-House Service

38. Establishing an in-house service should:
- Build on strengths of existing in-house provision.
 - Improve on current service, making efficiency savings
 - Offer more control over service delivery and quality.
39. The Study Group suggests that an in-house arrangement would be the more reliable, safer and cost effective option without a significant downside. A single management structure would enable the service to deploy resources most effectively, maximise flexibility and work to agreed priorities.
40. The Study Group considered the following possible model, to include an integrated Personal Adviser Service:



41. The service would still operate and be managed on a countywide basis but would have a strong viable presence in each Locality.
42. The overall number of Personal Advisers would be reduced from 12 to 10, balanced by 1.5 increase in social work capacity to better meet the demands on the Service.
43. An additional administrative support totalling the equivalent of two Scale 2 posts, based on current formulas, would be necessary to support the restructured enlarged Service.

44. Appropriate costings of the model for providing a Personal Adviser service on an in-house basis integrated with the current After Care service are as follows:

Staffing (Additional Staff)	Pay	Travel Internet	Accom Resource	Total
Team Managers	£41,089	£2,494	£3,640	£47,223
1.5 Social Workers	£50,462	£4,988	£4,494	£59,944
10 Social Work Assist	£241,940	£24,940	£21,650	£288,530
Administration (1.5 Sc3)	£27,565	£288	£2,306	£30,159
Equipment				£2,000
Additional Travel Costs				£19,630
Activities				£20,000
			Total	£467,486

45. An identified difficulty for the County Council would be to accommodate an expanded service, however it is envisaged that as any change to the provision would not be immediate there would be sufficient time to address this. Consultation with Property Services indicates that this expansion of staffing should be absorbable within existing accommodation plans.
46. Currently as part of their contracts NACRO and NCH offer a limited advice and support service for homeless 16 and 17 year olds (not care leavers). This is not included within this model and has not been evaluated by the Study Group. Further work and consultation is needed as to whether the Social Services Department should continue to offer this service and if so, how. It is suggested that in the interim, as part of any in-house model an additional 3 Personal Advisers could be employed to provide this service (cost approx £80,000). This interim arrangement is not included in the proposed model or costings for an integrated Personal Adviser Service.
47. A drop in centre is provided in Sutton in Ashfield as part of the current Personal Adviser Service. The Study Group considered that this provides a useful but limited service and it is not included in the proposed model for an integrated Personal Adviser Service.
48. The current contracts total £628,000 to provide Personal Adviser services for care leavers in Nottinghamshire. The proposed in-house model would total £467,486 with consequent savings to the service.

Consultation with NACRO/NCH

49. The Study Group recognised that the views of NACRO and NCH needed to be considered and asked the Locality Manager to discuss the issues that had been identified with the current service providers.
50. Consultation took place with NCH and NACRO in early 2006. Both organisations expressed disappointment at the proposed loss of contracts but recognised the reasoning behind the proposals.
51. The Study Group noted that both NACRO and NCH had already reluctantly agreed to a transition process with a six month notice period being agreed from 1 April – 1 October 2006.

52. The County Council is obliged to accept TUPE responsibilities for the staff employed by NACRO and NCH currently providing the Personal Adviser service. The Study Group noted that employees of NACRO and NCH likely to be effected by the transition to an in-house service were being consulted.

Recommendations

53. The After Care Study Group seeks support from the Social Services Select Committee and Cabinet to implement the following recommendations:

- I. The Study Group considered that the evidence of Performance Indicators and views of care leavers demonstrates significant progress and improvement by the After Care Service and that this should be noted and acknowledged.
- II. The Study Group encourages the County Council to support care leavers where ever possible but considers that the current arrangements for employment are satisfactory.
- III. The Study Group encourages the County Council to continue the work to ensure every young person is in suitable accommodation and minimise the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation except in exceptional circumstances.
- IV. The Study Group considers there to be a strong best value case for creating an integrated in-house After Care service to provide an improved service for the young people receiving support and to generate a more efficient service. The Study Group is conscious that this needs to be managed in a way which respects partner relationships with the independent and voluntary sectors and complies with contracting and tendering law.
- V. The current contracts total £629,000 to provide Personal Adviser services for care leavers in Nottinghamshire. The proposed in-house model would total £467,486. The Study Group considers that any future contract for Personal Adviser services, in-house or externally should be provided for considerably less than the current contracts.
- VI. The limited advice and support service for homeless 16 and 17 year olds (not care leavers) should be reviewed by the Social Services Department to identify whether and how this service could be provided in the future.