

Membership

Councillors

- Fiona Asbury (Chair)
- Barrie Cooper
- Jim Creamer
- Bob Cross
- Vincent Dobson
- Tom Pettengell
- Mel Shepherd
- Keith Walker
- Chris Winterton (Vice-Chair)

● absent

Officers

Paul Davies – Governance Officer
Helen Lee – Scrutiny Officer
Ashley Jackson – Researcher
Michelle Lee - Aftercare Services Manager, Children and Young People's Department
Karen Evans - Aftercare Social Worker, Children and Young People's Department
Thomas Aram - Personal Advisor, Children and Young People's Department
Rebecca Bowring - Employment and Training Advisor, Children and Young People's Department
Two Care Leavers

1. Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting held on 1 November 2010, having been circulated were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cross and Pettengell.

3. Declarations of interest

None.

4. Continuation of the Review (a) Education and Employment

Rebecca Bowring, one of the three Education and Employment Advisors (ETAs) in the Aftercare Team, introduced her work. She explained that each of them had 70-80 care leavers at any one time. Of the care leavers she worked with, 76% were in employment, training or voluntary work, and 24% not. Despite the difficult climate, the service enjoyed good links with colleges, the Department of Work and Pensions and other partner organisations. The advisor's role was to talk to young people about their wishes, and advise them how to achieve them. The service would try to remove barriers for the young person, which could include benefit traps, housing, child care, the ceasing of Education Maintenance Allowance.

Ms Bowring pointed out that young people might not begin to see the benefits of education until they were 18. They might come from a background where there was a not tradition of working. The service would help young people develop practical skills for looking for jobs. She referred to 16 apprenticeships currently available in Nottingham. However, candidates were being asked for Grade C GCSEs plus experience. Care leavers may not achieve these until they were 19 and too old for an apprenticeship.

In response to members' comments and questions, Ms Bowring replied:

- The service's performance compared well with other authorities in the same family. Ms Lee observed that Nottinghamshire was unusual in having ETAs located in the Aftercare Team. Many authorities relied on Connexions to provide the service.
- Young people were encouraged to develop their own views about education and employment. The service focused on young people who were not in education, employment and training, with whom they were in constant contact. Reasons for not being in education, employment or training might be that the young person had been out of school long term, had no fixed address, been a substance abuser, or just not wanted to do anything.
- A member pointed out that sometimes young people were required to sign on at a time when they should be at college. He wondered whether this problem could be resolved with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). Ms Bowring explained that up to the age of 20, young people received Income Support, and therefore did not have to sign on. The problem arose with part-time learners aged over 20, who would have to give up their training course if a job became available. This was a national problem. Ms Lee observed that the DWP operated in a rigid fashion. The Aftercare Team sought to advocate on care leavers' behalf, by asking for appointments to be changed, for example, and seeking fast-tracking through DWP processes. If Job Seekers' Allowance was suspended, the service could make up the difference.
- The end of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) had been announced. In view of this, the Aftercare Service was reviewing its own

employment incentive scheme. College learners' support funds were also being cut back.

- Members understood that some college course fees for over 18s were to increase. Ms Lee referred to the authority's legal duty to support care leavers in higher education, including the payment of tuition fees and accommodation costs. The challenge was ensuring that money was spent in the best way.
- Young people were encouraged to have aspirations, and the team would almost nag them to strive for their best.
- Care leavers were placed in apprenticeships with the County Council from time to time. County Council job vacancies were accessed through the intranet. It might be possible to make more progress by creating opportunities which met care leavers' needs. Reference was made to another local authority which ring-fenced vacancies for care leavers. Help with transport costs was also available.
- The two care leavers gave examples of the support which the team had given.

(b) Preparation for independent living

Karen Evans explained how care leavers were prepared for the transition from foster or residential care to their own accommodation or a hostel. This was discussed through the pathway planning process, and would include:

- Health: how to register with a doctor or dentist. How to make an appointment.
- Identity: race, culture, language, access to files, health, relationships (with family and peers)
- Cooking, cleaning, public transport
- Emotional and behavioural development
- Criminal activity (working with the Youth Offending Team)
- Accommodation: different levels of support were available

Tom Aram emphasised the importance of the service becoming involved at age 16, before young people formally left the authority's responsibility. At age 18, a young person would receive £51.85 per week in benefits. The team worked with the young person to think about how they could spend the money. Ms Lee referred to recent training for the team from the Financial Services Authority. The team could not give formal debt advice, but could discuss priorities with the young person, and had links with a credit union for advice. They answered questions from members.

- Could young people be steered towards the best deal for energy or mobile phone suppliers? - As adults, the young people would make their own decisions. However the team would go through the options with them.

- Cooking skills could be developed while the young people were in foster care. Skills for Independence courses, which included cooking, were available, and were equivalent to GCSEs. At Ollerton, a cook and eat group had been set up.
- Budget planning would become all the more important with rising energy prices and changes to benefit rates. The team had no statutory duty to give money to over 18s, but would do as much as the law allowed. This might include giving food parcels and negotiating with energy companies, which might have hardship funds. An example of support would be a young person who was working 12 hours per week. The team could top up their income to £51.85 per week.
- Every pathway plan had a section for finance. Plans were reviewed at least every six months.

(c) Young people's experience

Two care leavers answered members' questions about their experience, including how they had made friendships at college or through their foster family, and their positive views about the Aftercare Service.

(d) Next meeting - 17 January 2011

The next meeting would receive evidence about accommodation, homelessness, vulnerable 16-17 year olds, health and emotional support and the role of the independent reviewing officer.

The meeting closed at 3.25 pm.

CHAIR