

**19 January 2017**

**Agenda Item: 4**

**Children's Trust Executive Sponsor: Steve Edwards**

## **LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS STRATEGY UPDATE**

### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To update the Children's Trust Executive on the progress of the annual action plan for the Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers Strategy 2015-18.

### **Information and Advice**

2. The Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy 2015-18 sets out the Council's ambition as corporate parents to *ensure our looked after children and care leavers have all the opportunities that good parents afford their children*. The strategy was approved by Policy Committee in June 2015.
3. This strategy builds on the commitment to multi-agency working which is evidenced by the successes of the 2012-2015 strategy. The refreshed strategy now includes care leavers, because we recognise that our corporate parenting responsibility does not end when a young person leaves care.
4. This strategy was developed by the multi-agency Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy Group, which includes members from children's social care, education and health. Looked after children and young people in Nottinghamshire were also consulted on a number of occasions as part of the development of the strategy.
5. The 2015-18 strategy aims to drive improvement in six outcomes for looked after children and care leavers in Nottinghamshire:
  - looked after children and care leavers are happy and healthy
  - looked after children and care leavers are safe
  - looked after children and care leavers achieve their potential
  - looked after children and care leavers are prepared for adulthood
  - looked after children and care leavers are listened to
  - looked after children and care leavers build positive relationships
6. Progress is expected across all outcomes over the course of the three years. In order to ensure that the associated planned activity is realistic, deliverable and focused, the Strategy Group developed an Annual Action Plan, which is reviewed each year by looked after children, care leavers and professionals.

7. Each year, the Annual Action Plan focusses on a number of key outcome statements, which provide a vehicle for the multi-agency LAC and Care Leavers Strategy Group to drive improvement in the selected focus areas. The Annual Action Plan for 2016-17 has focussed on the following outcomes:

Children and young people:

- have good emotional wellbeing
  - have support with their mental health needs when they need it
  - have their health needs assessed when they enter care
  - have a safe place to live
  - are safe from sexual exploitation
  - achieve the expected standard at the end of each key stage of education (key stage 2 and key stage 4)
  - make good progress in school each year from their start point of entering care
  - remain in education or training, or move into employment after leaving school
  - have the best start in life
  - are supported to develop meaningful plans to help them prepare for the future
  - have the practical skills needed to live alone
  - can access support to prepare for parenting at the right time
  - are involved in making plans and giving feedback about their care
  - are involved in making plans about their future
  - have a chance to talk to their social workers alone
  - are supported to maintain meaningful contact with their birth families (where appropriate)
  - who are placed at a distance are kept safe and maintain positive links with Nottinghamshire
  - have an understanding of safe and positive relationships
  - have as few changes of social worker as possible.
8. In preparation for the development of the 2017/18 Action Plan, a number of the actions supporting these outcomes have been reviewed to ensure that actions remain realistic, deliverable and continue to be priority areas. This has been informed by a recent review of the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy by the Children in Care Council, to ensure that the priorities identified in the Strategy remain the correct and current priorities for service users.
9. Performance information for Looked After Children and Care Leavers in Nottinghamshire is set out in **Appendix A**.

### **Key Successes**

10. Key successes of the Strategy to date include:
- a specialist child sexual exploitation (CSE) service has been commissioned and The Children's Society hold the contract as of 1 July 2016. The service has been extended (from the previous contract with Barnardo's and the NSCPCC) to a wider cohort of children including care leavers and those children who need to be supported through a court process, as well as supporting parents to safeguard their children. It also, for

the first time, provides therapeutic support to children on a short to medium term as part of a child's recovery

- care leavers are given their health histories (or 'health passport') when they leave care; the Children in Care nursing team also offer health information to all care leavers at the review health assessment prior to leaving care or shortly afterwards if they opt out of health assessments
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) referrals are risk assessed and any urgent self-harm referrals are seen as per the self-harm protocol; the service offers a follow-up community appointment within seven days
- monthly CAMHS consultations continue with colleagues and young people in the three Local Authority mainstream residential homes
- 87% of Pathway Plans recently audited (2016-2017 Quarter 2) were graded as being good or better
- hotspot meetings are proving effective in addressing the most prolific missing children
- placement support to young people fostered by Local Authority foster carers has been strengthened by confirming the permanent roles of fostering family workers; these workers are involved in identity work and direct work with young people, as well as supporting foster carers in maintaining placements at times of challenge
- there is evidence in case file of use of 'Getting Ready for Adult Life' workbooks with young people in preparation for leaving care
- A work experience scheme has been developed for Nottinghamshire's care leavers in partnership with NCC Skills for Employment
- There is increased life story work evidenced on files and this is supported by an increase in scrutiny by Independent Reviewing Officers.

## **Areas for Continued Improvement**

11. There continues to be a challenge in the provision of accessible emotional wellbeing and mental health services for care leavers between the ages of 18 and 21 years. If there is a formal mental health diagnosis then access to adult services is well planned and timely; however, a proportion of Nottinghamshire's care leavers have poor mental health (sometimes resulting in self-harm) but no diagnosis. A review of the current emotional and mental health provision to looked after children and care leavers is being undertaken, as well as an exercise to scope the emotional and mental health needs of unaccompanied asylum seeking children;
12. Additional areas that require continued focus and improvement include:
  - Ensuring that social workers work collaboratively with the fostering service and supported accommodation providers to ensure that appropriate placements are identified for children and young people, and that the appropriate and relevant support is provided to placements
  - Exploration of the use of technology in tools used for participation
  - Ensuring that the contact arrangements with family members, friends or significant connected persons is addressed in care plans and pathway plans
  - Ensuring that regular contact is made with children and young people placed beyond neighbouring authorities, by undertaking visits and exploring the use of technology in-between.

### **Other Options Considered**

13. This report is for noting only

### **Reason/s for Recommendation/s**

14. This report is for noting only

### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

15. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, 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, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

### **Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults Implications**

16. The strategy and action plan seeks to strengthen support and practice which will ensure looked after children and care leavers continue to be safeguarded.

### **Implications for Service Users**

17. Looked after children and care leavers will benefit from improved services and multiagency working aimed at improving outcomes.

### **RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1) That the update on the progress of the action plan for the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy 2015-18 be noted.

**Steve Edwards**

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### **Background Papers**

None