

Progress Report on the Care Leavers Strategy and Action Plan.

Report of Helen Fergusson, Head of Children' Social Care, Durham County Council

Electoral division affected:

None.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report outlines the progress of the Care Leavers Service action plan and strategy.

Executive Summary

- 2 The Children Act 1989 places duties on Local Authorities towards 'looked after' and previously 'looked after' children as they exit the care system. The service to young people who have been in the care of Durham Children's services is delivered to all young people aged between 16 and 25 who fall within the eligibility criteria. This criterion includes:
 - (a) **eligible child**, who is a child aged 16 or 17 and is currently Looked After or has been looked after by the Local Authority for 13 weeks since the age of 14;
 - (b) **relevant child**, who is a child aged 16 or 17 who has been Looked After for 13 weeks since the aged of 14 or who has been looked after since the age of 16 but is no longer Looked After;
 - (c) **former relevant child**, who is a young person aged 18-25 who has been an eligible or relevant child prior to becoming 18;
 - (d) **or other qualifying care leavers**, who is young person who was Looked After for a period of less than 13 weeks since the age of 14 or was Looked After since the age of 16.

Recommendation

- (a) Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to note the contents of the report and presentation.

Background

- 3 The offer from the Care Leaving Service is published in the Local Offer to Care Leavers which provides details of how support will be provided to young people with regards to:
 - (a) Where young people live; this includes all options, staying put, supporting lodgings, supported accommodation, living alone and university accommodation as well as advice to avoid homelessness and support for any housing issues;
 - (b) Money: help with managing money, help with benefits, setting up home money, and all other types of financial advice;
 - (c) Looking After themselves; Physical and emotional health advice and support, sexual health, drug and alcohol support, domestic abuse and healthy relationship advice, someone to talk to, smoking cessation and opportunities to get involved in things;
 - (d) Education employment and training; advice when thinking about leaving school, sixth form or college, work experience and part time jobs, learning to drive, apprenticeships or traineeships, going to university, getting a job.

Staffing

- 4 Moving forwards this service will be provided from within dedicated teams working with children who are looked after up to the age of 18 and a Care Leavers service working with young adults with care leaving status up to the age of 25.
- 5 This will allow focus on the needs of the care leavers within this service from a staff group who have the skills, experience and motivation to meet the needs of this group of young people.
- 6 It is anticipated that the service will work with approximately 300 young adults at any one time with two teams of Young People's Advisors supported by two team managers and two Social Work Consultants to support the service with continuous improvement planning.

Care Leavers Action Plan

- 8 A presentation of the progress of the Care Leavers Action plan is attached at Appendix 2
- 9 The action plan includes several areas of focus. The progress of these is recorded in detail in the plan but include:

- Pathway Plans;
 - Education, Employment, and training;
 - Suitable accommodation;
 - Improved health outcomes;
 - Preparation for adulthood;
 - Co-production.
- 10 Moving forwards co-production of the Care Leavers action plan is identified as an essential aspect of the planning. A group of young people is being established to meet in November and
- Review the progress of the action plan;
 - Assess the DCC Local Offer to Care Leavers against national Local Offers;
 - Develop the renewed action plan for 2022/23.
- 11 There has been continued work with the electronic recording system (LCS) used by the Young People's Service to develop the best practice Pathway Plan using the selected model of social work in Durham (Signs of Safety). A template of this has been produced and is being shared as a test within the system.
- 12 The impact of Covid 19 on the stability of the education and employment opportunities for young people across the world have been identified as significant and problematic. Within Durham the academic achievements of children in care and leaving care remain statistically positive. Care Leavers who attend university are well supported and care leavers are identified in the recruitment policies within DCC as a group who should be offered interviews. There is also additional support available to managers when seeking to employ care leaving young people.
- 13 The accommodation of care leavers in homes matched to their individual needs remains an area of high priority. Where young people have had stable fostering homes, they are supported to remain within that home under a staying put arrangement. When they are ready to move into adulthood there are a range of options available from supported lodgings, to supported accommodation and tenancy support into their own homes. The quality of this provision is monitored by commissioning services and through a supported accommodation panel where the wider service planning needs are progressed.
- 14 This aligns with preparation for adulthood and the development of programmes that promote skills and confidence but avoid the feeling of 'independence' as a concept as it is considered unhelpful to young people leaving care to push towards independence when in fact what is needed in successful adulthood is the identification of protective,

supportive and loving relationships that aid people to feel and to be safe and to engage with all aspects of their lives from this position.

- 15 The health needs of care leavers remain an area of concern and has been impacted by Covid 19 as services nationally have been stretched and many people have not reached out to services for support. The mental health needs of young people have been supported throughout with continued access to services to reduce isolation and promote communication. There is concern that there is not sufficient evidence that young people are using the health passports to engage with and promote their own health needs as they mature, and this is being progressed through the health sub-group of the Children Looked After partnership along with identification of the barriers to young people attending for dental check ups post the Covid lock down.

Development and Adaption during Covid-19

- 16 The Young People's Service has continued to offer services throughout Covid-19 with some adaptations to ensure families continue to access appropriate levels of support. All young people in care have been able to access the same level of support as was available to them prior to COVID. We have been selected as one of 8 Local Authorities nationally to take part in research funded by the University of Bedfordshire to understand the impact of Covid on the experience of young people leaving care. This will allow us to understand the experiences of our young people in the context of the current climate and of their wider experiences of having been cared for by Durham County Council and of being a Durham County Council care leaver.

Conclusion

- 17 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel will have an oversight and understanding of the Care Leaver Service and will be aware of the continuous developments within the service to ensure we strive to meet the needs of young people.

Author

Jodie Henderson 03000 265759

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

We are bound by duties under the Children & Social Work Act / Children's Act to act in the best interests of children and young people.

Finance

None.

Consultation

None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

The Young People's Service provides care and support to young people who identify as transgender, this forms 1% of the overall service group.

Climate Change

None

Human Rights

Children and young people have access to the DCC complaints process

Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

As detailed above the Young People's Service is currently being restructured to provide a continuous through care team for all children (aged 0-17) and an 18+ care experienced team.

Accommodation

Should children and young people come into the care of the Local Authority, there is a need to ensure there is sufficient suitable placements

Risk

The risk of not providing the services and supports required by young people who have care leaver status is that they could be at risk of harm, either immediately or as a result of a failure to identify their needs and best support them to achieve their potential.

Procurement

None

Appendix 2: Summary Presentation of Progress of Care Leavers Action Plan

Attached as a separate document