

Corporate Parenting Panel

26 January 2024

Outcome of Focused Ofsted Visit: Care Leavers Service



Report of John Pearce, Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Service, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

None

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide Corporate Parenting Panel with the outcome of the Ofsted focused visit to the Care Leavers Service on 14 and 15 November 2023.
- 2 To provide Corporate Parenting Panel a copy of the full letter, attached as appendix B, for their consideration.

Executive summary

- 3 A focused visit took place by His Majesty's Inspectorate Ofsted on 14 and 15 November 2023. The focus of the visit was to inspect Durham County Council's arrangements for care-experienced young people, specifically the quality of preparation for adulthood, the quality and suitability of accommodation, and care leavers with specific needs. The impact of leaders on practice was also considered as part of this visit.
- 4 Overall, the report presented significant strengths identified within Durham County Council's Leaving Care service and wider systems. Leadership throughout the council was seen to be robust, ambitious, and tenacious. Leaders were seen to have a detailed knowledge of the service and responded at pace to changing needs. This includes the develop of the Local Offer, the development of the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Team and the Care Leavers Hubs.
- 5 The quality of support offered by Young People's Advisors (YPA's) was positively highlighted throughout the report, including young people in specific circumstances.
- 6 Service quality and grip from councillors and senior leaders through to front line managers was found to be a strength.

- 7 Ofsted made one recommendation in respect of the written report for supervision to ensure it is reflective of the feedback given by the Young People's Advisors. This is currently an area for improvement identified by the service.

Recommendations

- 8 Members of Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to:
 - (a) review the content of the report and appended full Ofsted inspection letter attached as appendix B.

Background

- 9 A focused visit took place by His Majesty's Inspectorate Ofsted on 14 and 15 November 2023. The focus of the visit was to inspect Durham County Council's arrangements for care-experienced young people, specifically the quality of preparation for adulthood, the quality and suitability of accommodation, and care leavers with specific needs. The impact of leaders on practice was also considered as part of this visit.

Leadership

- 10 During the visit, Ofsted found strong and effective leadership throughout the system. Ofsted identified:

'Leaders have a detailed understanding of the strengths of this area of service and where further improvements can be made. Senior leaders have further developed and improved services for care-experienced young people. This includes the local offer to care-experienced young people and establishing a specialist service for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. A second care leavers hub has opened which is offering a greater range of support and activities for care-experienced young people across the county.'

- 11 Ofsted went on to describe:

'As a corporate parent, the local authority is diligent in its efforts to ensure that care-experienced young people are given the opportunity to achieve their goals and they are ambitious for their futures. The corporate parenting strategy has been developed in collaboration with care-experienced young people. This collaboration is meaningful, and the voice of care-experienced young people is central to decision-making.'

Relationships and responsiveness to needs for Care Experienced Young People

- 12 Young People's Advisors responses to the need of Care Experienced Young people was highlighted positively by Ofsted and in almost all children's records reviewed this was consistently achieved. They were described as committed and clear on how to support young people with most achieving their goals and support to young people in university was highlighted as a key area of strength.
- 13 Ofsted reflected the more recent practice change of allocating a Young People's Advisor as soon as possible post 16 as a key area to allow the relationship between the children and worker develop.
- 14 Ofsted found most Care Experienced Young People had Pathway Plans which understood and reflected their needs and that they were living in

appropriate accommodation. Prompt responses were noted for those children not in appropriate accommodation and YPA's linked in with housing providers to address this promptly.

- 15 Ofsted highlighted that for Care Experienced Young People with specific needs, young parents had access to a large range of support with a responsive relationship with their YPA. For those young people in custody, most were in need of having an ongoing relationship with the YPA who supported to prepare them for a return to the community. A minority had less obvious support, which is an area of focus for the service in the expansion of the prison project which proactively reaches out to young people in custody.
- 16 For Care Experienced Young People who came to Durham as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), Ofsted commended the leadership and development of the UASC Team. This was praised for the expert knowledge of the specific circumstances of these young people and the commitment to maintain relationships to support them.

Staffing, Support and Training

- 17 Ofsted recognised the stability of staffing in the Care Leavers Services, the management and training offer to staff, and the clear leadership grip on the quality of the service offered, which extended from councillors and senior leaders to frontline managers.
- 18 Ofsted did identify that whilst YPAs described positive and reflective supervision experiences, this was not always reflected in the written record. This has been identified as an area of development.
- 19 The Care Leavers offer was described by Ofsted as clear and accessible and throughout the visit, it was highlighted that collaboration and co-production was evident.

Quality Assurance

- 20 Ofsted described Political and senior leaders have a detailed oversight of practice within the care leaving service. The local authority's quality assurance framework provides leaders with a thorough overview of practice and the impact of services and interventions. Audits are used effectively to further enhance practice. This reflects the service knowing itself well and the areas to focus on to further improve.

Care Leavers Offer

- 21 Ofsted found the offer to Care Experienced Young People to be easy to access and clear. It was highlighted the offer had been co-produced with Care Experienced Young People and the council were commended

for their commitment to review this regularly to ensure the offer was responsive to young people in County Durham.

Conclusion

- 22 Corporate Parenting Panel will note the findings of the Ofsted inspection and the significantly positive service delivered by Durham County Council for Care Experienced Young People.
- 23 The area of recommendation identified by Ofsted, in respect of the written supervision for staff, is an area the service has as a priority for improvement and will be reviewed with audit activity.

Author

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None in the context of this update report

Finance

None

Consultation and Engagement

The range of consultation and engagement was demonstrated as part of the Ofsted inspection

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None

Climate Change

None

Human Rights

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

None in the context of this update report

Accommodation

None in the context of this update report

Risk

None

Procurement

None