

**Manchester City Council
Report for Resolution**

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee - 6 September 2016

Subject: Improving Outcomes for Care Leavers

Report of: Strategic Director for Children's Services

Summary

This report sets out to describe the services offered to care leavers, their progress, and our activity to improve their outcomes.

Recommendations

That Scrutiny Committee consider and comment on the contents of the report

Wards Affected: All

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

None

1.0 Introduction

1.1 It is a statutory duty of the Local Authority to provide a leaving care service to looked after children aged 16 plus, and for all care leavers aged 18 to 21, and for those aged up to 25 if they are in full time education or training.

1.2 Barnardos are commissioned to provide a leaving care service to the large majority of Manchester's care leavers on behalf of the city council. The Service is commissioned to work with a maximum of 720 young people at any one time. Separate to this service, the Council operates a specialist care leaver's service, staffed and managed internally, for those care leavers who are unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

1.3 This report sets out to describe Manchester's services to care leavers and our activity to develop our service offer, as well as detailing care leavers' progress and outcomes.

2.0 Background

2.1 Leaving care services and outcomes for care leavers in relation to accommodation, and education, employment and training, was the subject of an earlier report to Scrutiny Committee which was presented and considered at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 26th January 2016.

2.2 Governance arrangements for care leaver services include regular reporting to the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Children's Improvement Board, and monthly performance review meetings.

3.0 Our Services to Care Leavers

3.1 Personal Advisor Service

3.1.1 Both the Barnados service and the service for unaccompanied asylum seeking children deliver a Personal Advisor service to our care leavers. Each care leaver has a named Personal Advisor. Personal Advisor's meet care leavers on a regular basis, providing advocacy and support, and assisting them to achieve their aspirations in their journey through adulthood to independence.

3.1.2 The teams work closely with social workers, residential staff, supported lodgings providers, foster carers and a range of other key workers from partner agencies to assist in the transition of care leavers to independent living.

3.2 Pathway Plans

3.2.1 It is a requirement that all looked after children aged 16 plus and care leavers aged 18 to 21 have a Pathway Plan setting out their route to independence and the support that they will be offered on their journey.

3.2.2 Looked after children aged 16 and 17 in Manchester retain an allocated looked after children social worker up to age 18. The social worker is responsible for drafting

the Pathway Plan for the young person. For care leavers aged 18 plus, the personal advisors from the Barnardos service and the unaccompanied asylum seeking team draft the Pathway Plan.

3.3 Services to Support Education, Employment, and Training

3.3.1 In Manchester we have high aspirations for young people and this is reflected through the high numbers who attend Higher Education. During June 2016, 77 care leavers were attending University. There is a generous financial package of support offered to support our young people to aim high. For care leavers attending University the financial support package can include an accommodation element, a personal needs allowance and an incentive allowance for each academic term. The total annual value of this package is over three times the £2000 a year that the Government require Local Authorities to provide their care leavers.

3.3.2 Care leavers attending further education or completing a traineeship, apprenticeship or voluntary work are supported to access an incentive allowance.

3.3.3 Our young people with the highest needs who are not ready to enter the workplace or attend formal courses of study will often have had less engagement whilst in a school setting and this may have lead to poor outcomes and disengagement. For this group of young people different models of engagement are applied. The care leaver services link with the Department for Work and Pensions to explore employment or training opportunities and support to young people who are not currently work ready.

3.3.4 We offer a weekly drop in at the service which is attended on a monthly basis by a range education or training providers. This includes the Targeted Youth Support Service, Manchester College and Manchester Metropolitan University. Both Manchester College and Manchester Metropolitan University along with the Princes Trust have contributed to the delivery of education and training focused days at the service.

3.3.5 Our Virtual School supports the development of high quality Personal Education Plans for our looked after children aged 16 and 17.

3.4 Services to Support Care Leavers with Accommodation

3.4.1 There is a range of financial support to support young people with their accommodation and maintenance needs. This includes a 16 plus maintenance allowance for looked after children or care leavers aged 16 or 17 living independently. In addition care leavers can access a setting up home allowance of £2,000 to help furnish their independent accommodation.

3.4.2 We know that young people who remain with their foster carers or in well supported living arrangements have much better outcomes. Whilst 'Staying Put' in foster care became a duty in 2014 for local authorities, Manchester has historically always had a commitment to maintaining a placement for young people who turn 18 with their ex-foster carers. The Staying Put Policy was developed for Manchester and

in June there were 66 young people living in these arrangements and a request for a further 5 for approval. Manchester's target is to have 82 young people by April 2017.

3.4.3 Manchester has its own successful supported lodgings scheme where providers are recruited to support young people who lodge in their home. This scheme provides quality supported accommodation for young people who can step up into this more supported living environment where they may have struggled in managing in a more independent setting. The scheme is also successful in re-engaging young people and most young people are engaged in education, employment or training activity or have a plan to re-access this.

3.4.4 Manchester commissions specialist providers to meet the housing needs of care leavers. This is done through the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities approved framework in relation to supported accommodation. The framework ensures that there is a quality assurance framework in place by which providers can be measured and held to account. This provision is used for the most part for 17- 18 year olds. Stepping down from these arrangements is usually into independent living arrangements or into alternative supported housing funded through the Housing Related Support Fund.

3.4.5 In addition to the above, we commissioned 30 shared living places in 10 houses in the Openshaw area of Manchester called in a project called 'First Keys'. We are now working with First Keys to explore an alternative arrangement that considers citywide provision in areas where care leavers are living and want to live along with putting in more support hours so as to ensure a successful outcome for those young people with higher needs.

3.4.6 We commission the Young Person's Support Foundation to provide a range of housing support to Manchester's young people including care leavers. They deliver a 'house trained' course where upon successful completion young people are able to increase their housing priority group from 3 to 2.

3.5 Health Services for Care Leavers

3.5.1 We know that care leavers can experience a range of health issues, particularly in relation to their emotional well-being and as an adult may struggle to access services. Some care leavers can often ignore their physical health needs or have a poor diet, self-harm or engage in risky behaviour. Some young people report feeling lonely and isolated with the subsequent impact on their confidence and self esteem. From the leaving care service we deliver various options to young people to access health and wellbeing support that provides a level of flexibility:

3.5.2 A named Looked After Children Nurse attends the service weekly to provide advice and guidance to staff and can meet with young people irrespective of their age. This team can trace the GP that the young person is registered with and also assist in identifying dentists and GP's in their local area.

3.5.3 Barnardos uses some of its own funds to commission a counselling service called MyTime. This provides counsellor hours along with a mentor who can engage in one to one sessions. Telephone mentoring is also available to those young people

who would prefer that this was not face to face or who may live a distance away. MyTime also work with the service to deliver groups.

3.5.4 Health partners have commissioned a free online emotional and mental health support service using a website called Kooth.com. Young people can sign up, choose an avatar (an online character) to represent them anonymously and have an online chat with a counsellor or use the many other features on the site, such as message forums and blogs. Children who are looked after but placed out of area can register using either the Town Hall's postcode or their original postcode. This is available to 11-19 year olds.

3.6 Listening to Care Leavers

3.6.1 Barnardos group work coordinator along with Manchester's Engagement Team facilitates a care leaver's participation group. In addition there is a care leaver who co-chairs the Voice and Influence sub-group of the LAC Strategy Group and also attends Corporate Parenting Panel.

3.6.2 Young People have been visited by health, education, and Department for Education representatives and have participated in both regional and national engagement activities. This has included meeting the Minister Edward Timpson MP to discuss Government proposals for new legislation on care leavers services. The increase in participation activity has meant that our delivery model has been viewed by young people and commented on. Young People are regularly involved in the recruitment of both Personal Advisors and Team Managers in the Barnardos service as members of interview panels.

3.6.3 We have supported young people to complete a leaflet on accessing social housing in Manchester for care leavers.

4. Activity to Improve Services to and outcomes for Care Leavers

4.1 There is a multi agency Looked After Children and Care Leavers' Strategy that is currently driving improvement and development work with looked after children and care leavers' services. Priority Objective 5 of the strategy is that '**Children and Young People achieve independence as successful and responsible adults**'. There is a sub group of multi-agency professionals meeting regularly to progress actions to improve services to and outcomes for care leavers. Progress is regularly reported to the Corporate Parenting Panel. The following sections detail some of our activity to improve outcomes over the last year.

4.2. Following a review of the service in 2015, which included consultation with key partner agencies and young people, it was evidenced that caseloads were too high for individual Personal Advisors. Additional resource has been allocated by both Manchester City Council (4 Personal Advisors) and Barnardos (1 Team Manager) in order to reduce caseloads to 25 and offer better management oversight. Not all the additional posts have been recruited to permanently but there is agency cover in place for the additionally. Due to the additional manager allocation, we are now progressing Team Managers to take lead areas to represent and promote the needs

of care leavers across our partner agencies in key areas which are identified as accommodation, education, health and criminal justice.

4.3 Training has been delivered to support social workers drafting Pathway Plans. We have increased our quality assurance activity through creating a new audit tool to ensure the quality of Pathway Plans is sufficient.

4.4 Over the last year, Barnardos were successful, as part of their corporate partnership with John Lewis Partnership (JLP), in obtaining a trainer from JLP seconded to our leaving care service two days a week for three and a half months. During this time they:

- Engaged in one to one work with young people including CV writing and interview coaching skills
- Met with education, employment and training (EET) providers and delivered an EET focused session where 24 young people came to the service to explore opportunities
- Compiled a pack to use with young people to help them look at securing employment, where to go and skills to practice. This is being explored as how this may be rolled out to key workers and carers in Manchester
- Arranged for two 'visual artists' to upgrade the service reception and kitchen areas to include notice board headers and make the space more colourful and inviting and creating a 'you said, we did' space.

Whilst this work has now concluded, an intern has been secured for a further 3 months to continue to deliver some of this education, employment, and training focused work.

4.5 In our work to ensure young people have a vision that is inspirational, the Virtual School for Looked After Children has been working to develop the Electronic Personal Education Plan (PEP). Over the last year the team worked hard to improve the completion and quality of this document. During this period, 90% of PEP's were in place and the plan is for 100% next academic year. The Virtual School Team have also rolled out training to social workers, colleges, managers and Personal Advisors on the PEP process and delivery.

4.6 Barnardos contributed to a successful bid for 3 years funding from Comic Relief by Greater Manchester Youth Network (GMYN) to engage with 25 young people a year around volunteering and personal development opportunities with the aim of improving their future employability. This commenced in April 2016 and replicates successful models GMYN have in other Greater Manchester Authorities.

4.7. We do celebrate young people's achievements and we have nominated young people who have then participated in both Manchester and Greater Manchester Looked After Children Awards.

4.8. The Looked After Children Placement Panel has been reviewing all 16-17 LAC young people accommodation placements. This considers the current situation, the Pathway Plan and the quality of the transition plan contained in these documents. Improvement themes were identified through this process that included: Pathway

Plan completion and quality; the timeliness of leaving care involvement; completion of PEPs and the pathway into further education, training and employment after the age of 16.

4.9 The needs analysis of the LAC population and the Placement Sufficiency Strategy have been completed and key aims for care leavers are to increase access to staying put, supported lodgings, and other quality local supported accommodation.

4.10 Encouragingly we have seen a continual increase in the numbers of individuals applying to be assessed as supported lodgings providers. In June there were 67 providers, a further 10 currently being assessed for approval and 6 of these will be completed for the August approval panel. In June there were 5 further approaches from individuals who were interested in being assessed as supported lodgings providers.

4.11 In relation to Staying Put, as at June 2016 we had increased the number of care leavers in these arrangements with former foster carers to 66. We currently have had 5 requests for 'staying put' packs to set up new arrangements.

4.12 There has been work to ensure that young people are aware of their entitlements as care leavers. A web page has been created on Manchester City Council's internet site to provide information for Manchester Care Leaver's on their entitlements and opportunities in their local community. There are links to University opportunities, apprenticeships and links to the Job Centre Plus. Health access and specialist resources can also be sourced through the portal.

4.13 In addition to the website, there are leaflets that have been developed to provide a different medium through which this information is available. Following some feedback from young people we will need to work with them further to get a 'look' to the leaflets that is in line with their views about the design before we do a print run.

4.14 Following the website being available in June, Personal Advisors were tasked with sending the information by text or email to young people so they were aware of this and encouraged them to leave feedback as to the content and style.

4.15 In relation to 'staying in touch' with our care leavers, the service has been striving to improve the percentage of care leavers that we maintain contact with. Data at the end of June 2016 indicated that we had made contact with 91% of care leavers in the previous 8 weeks. The service is in much more regular contact with many care leavers dependent on their needs at the time.

4.16 There are currently, as at August 2016, 33 of our care leavers in custody. This is a reduction from 36 in July 2016. The leaving care service works in partnership with Manchester's Youth Offending Service and the Care Leavers Association to support our care leavers when they are in custody and on release. A steering group has recently been established made up of representatives from the leaving care service, the youth offending service, the probation service, Manchester Metropolitan University and the Care Leavers Association to co-ordinate and improve support services to this group of young people.

5. Outcomes for our Care Leavers

5.1 Our services and activity are aimed at supporting care leavers to be successfully independent. There are some key aims and performance measures that support young people to become successful adults and reflect how well or not the Council is supporting care leavers. The following indicates our latest performance on three key measures;

5.2 Care leavers in suitable accommodation – across our whole care leaver population latest data (May) indicates that 94.3% of them are in suitable accommodation.

The Government measure for care leavers in suitable accommodation measures only those aged 17 to 21. On this measure our performance at the end of 2015/16 was 79.1%.

Our performance here was just short of the 2014/15 (latest data) national average of 80.7%, the statistical neighbour average of 81.5% and the northwest average of 82.4%.

5.3 Care leavers who are in education employment or training – across our whole care leaver population latest data (May) indicates that 75.18% of them are in education, employment or training.

On the Government measure accounting for just the 17 to 21 age cohort our performance for 2015/16 was 47.4%.

This is better than the 2014/15 (latest data) North West average of 46.2%, almost equal to the national average of 47.8%, but some way short of our statistical neighbour average of 56.7%

5.4 Care leavers attending university – from the cohort of all the young people aged 18 to 25 that our leaving care services are working with, as at June 2016 we had 77 attending university.

The government measure of care leavers attending university measures only care leavers aged 19 to 21. At the end of 2015/16 we had 46 care leavers aged 19 to 21 attending university. This is equal to 9.2%.

On the latest comparator data available, which is for 2014/15, the national average on this measure is 6%, core cities average is 6%, the statistical neighbour average is 6.25% and the average for the North West is 8%. With our performance at 9.2% for 2015/16 this gives some indication that we are performing well very well on this measure.

6. Summary

6.1 A lot of work has been on-going over the last six months aimed at improving services for care leavers. We have developed more robust performance monitoring arrangements and are developing improved performance data. Progress has been

made on keeping in touch with care leavers with an increased percentage now being in touch than previously.

6.2 We are striving to improve our communication with young people and have made good progress having developed a new website page and leaflets setting out care leaver entitlements. We are working with commissioners and housing providers to improve the accommodation offer to young people and are making progress. At the same time we have been increasing access to family based accommodation through staying put and supported lodgings placements.

6.3 The new audits will support our efforts to improve Pathway Plans and to identify patterns of good and weak performance. Further improvement work will be informed by the outcome of the service review currently being undertaken by our colleagues from Salford Council.

6.4 We have been supporting our care leavers to engage and participate and in this respect supported two of our care leavers to attend a consultation with the Minister Edward Timpson, MP, about potential new proposals for care leaver services. These include setting a requirement for care leavers to have access to Personal Advisors up to age 25 and for each local authority to publicise and 'offer' to care leavers. We will keep Corporate Parenting Panel informed about the developing proposals nationally, the recent DfE visit, and the outcome of the review by Salford in the coming months.

6.5 In relation to key outcomes for care leavers, for the percentage of them in suitable accommodation, our performance is just short of the national average. In relation to the percentage of care leavers in education, employment or training, our performance is stronger than the performance across the North West and almost on a par with the national average. And we have strong performance in supporting care leavers to access University.

6.6 Moving forward, we are striving to develop our services further. We have commissioned a review into our current 'offer' for care leavers. Leaving Care Service Managers from Salford Council have been commissioned to review our care leavers service and our offer to Manchester care leavers with a view to informing our improvement journey. This work has now commenced with an expected completion date for end of August 2016.

6.7 We will also be striving to ensure we improve and develop the service in line with the new 'Promise' the Council and its partners as Corporate Parents have made to looked after children and care leavers, and to respond to Government proposals for reforming services for care leavers.