

		AGENDA ITEM 5
		PAF/01/15
Committee:	People and Families Scrutiny Committee	
Date:	15 January 2015	
<u>Children in Care</u>		
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The attached report was considered by the Corporate Parenting Panel on 16 December 2014.

Update on the implementation of recommendations from the Leaving Care Review

1. Context

A review of the Leaving Care Service was undertaken at the beginning of 2013, with recommendations agreed for implementation between June 2013 and January 2014.

The priorities for the review were:

- Meet all statutory requirements for young people in care and young people leaving care, including those with disabilities and unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people
- Minimise changes of worker
- Develop a flexible approach that recognises difference between young people and the age at which they mature
- Build on identified strengths of service
- Take proper account of young people's views
- Increase specialist advice regarding employability of young people
- Increase availability of post 18 accommodation, including permanent accommodation
- Improve the quality of Pathway Planning
- Minimise disruption to staff and service

2. Recommendations and outcome

- I. 0 – 18 service for children and young people who have been looked after before the age of 16. These young people remain in the CiC service until the age of 18, with a PA allocated alongside the SW from the age of 17, who will then remain the allocated PA after the young person reaches 18.

This has been implemented. There has been a 3 fold increase over the past year in the number of 16 and 17 year olds remaining with their allocated Social Worker in the Children in Care teams.

- II. Exceptions to the above will be made when a young person is aged 16 or over and their allocated CiC SW leaves or there is a mutual agreement between the young person, IRO and Social Work team that a transfer to a different worker is in that young person's interests. In these cases young people will be transferred to a Leaving Care Social Worker.

As above. There has been a recent additional exception agreed in respect of unaccompanied asylum seekers, due to the significant increase in the number of such children and young people over the last 3 months. This has placed the Children in Care Specialist team under extreme pressure and action was required in order to mitigate this.

- III. Young people who enter care from the age of 16 will be allocated to a SW from the Leaving Care Service. If that young person remains in care that worker will remain involved until at least the age of 19, possibly beyond depending on level of vulnerability. There will be no separate PA allocated.

This has been implemented.

- IV. Management of UASC to remain as now, except that young people aged 16 will transfer to LaCT as soon as they have been age assessed, accepted for a service and completed the preliminary immigration agency requirements. Advice to Leaving Care workers regarding UASC issues will be provided by CiC Specialist team as required.

See Point ii above

- V. Young people with disabilities to be considered within the context of CWD review, with the possibility of either a 0 -25 service or all age disability service, with a specific in-care/leaving care pathway agreed.

0 - 25 service now established. In this service young people in care continue to transfer to the 16 – 25 team at the age of 16, but will then have no further change of worker whilst they remain eligible for leaving care services

- VI. Independent Reviewing Officers to chair the first Pathway Plan review after the 18th birthday (subject to agreement from young person).

Implemented.

- VII. Establishment of 4 (1 per quadrant) Employability Workers, transferred/seconded from Youth Service, based within the Leaving Care Service and working alongside the Targeted Youth Adviser. These workers would focus on the development and brokering of work readiness schemes, including work experience, apprenticeships and shadowing, particularly within the council and district partner agencies. The workers would link closely with the council's Employability Unit.

This recommendation has been both amended and delayed. Since the review the DWP has established a new programme of Social Justice Coaches, who are employed to work with people who are vulnerable to being long term unemployed. Care leavers have been highlighted as a specific target group and the DWP offices in Essex have allocated a Social Justice Coach to work alongside the Leaving Care Services in each quadrant. This is proving highly successful. Each quadrant also continues to benefit from a Targeted Youth Adviser, whose job it is to focus on care leavers who are not engaged in education, training or employment. In order not to duplicate the work already being undertaken by the Social Justice Coaches and the TYAs we have amended the specification for the Employability Workers, who will now

be focused on the creation of work opportunities for care leavers. There will be two of these workers across the council and they will be based within the Employability and Skills Unit.

The delay in establishing these posts has been caused by the need to review budgets in the light of the corporate spending review. We are now hopeful that funding has been identified and these posts will be established in early 2015.

- VIII. Use of “HMOs” for 16 and 17 year olds is already being reviewed within ART, with a move to significantly reducing their use, particularly for more vulnerable young people. Their title should be changed to “Supported Housing” as “House of Multiple Occupation” gives an impression of lack of individual care and attention.

Implemented; although the term semi-independent accommodation is more widely used than Supported Housing. Use of the term HMO has ceased within Family Operations although it remains the regulatory term for this type of accommodation and is still adopted by DfE, therefore our DfE returns continue to refer to HMOs.

The number of placements in semi-independent accommodation has reduced, from 110 placements in 2013/14 to a projected 97 by March 2015 (currently stands at 65 this year).

- IX. An assumption of continued foster care to the age of 18 for all young people aged 16 and 17 who are already in foster placements.

Implemented – the culture of expecting young people in foster care to prepare for a move to semi-independent accommodation at the age of 16 or 17 has now changed. The introduction and expansion of Staying Put has further supported this change of culture and expectation. The majority of young people eligible for Staying Put arrangements are taking this up, with 116 young people taking up this offer so far this year and 61 current arrangements.

- X. A range of supported options, including foster care or supported lodgings, available for young people who have been living in residential units.

This remains extremely challenging. Given that our first choice of accommodation for children and young people in care is always foster care or supported lodgings it follows that we only opt to use residential care for children and young people for whom foster care or supported lodgings is not suitable or possible. We do work with our Residential Providers on the understanding that the care plan for the child is to achieve a move from residential care into family care but the older a young person is the more difficult that is to achieve before they are 18. Work is continuing to establish a culture of expectation of family based care regardless of age and alongside that the current Sufficiency Project

has a focus on increasing the availability of carers for older and more “challenging” children and young people.

- XI. Semi-independent accommodation predominantly aimed at young people aged 17 or 18+ who will be able to remain there as a transition to permanent independent housing.

See viii above. We have not yet achieved the position we wish to be in of semi-independent accommodation being a placement of choice for a small cohort of young people, it continues to be used mainly as a last resort.

- XII. Development of district housing links within the ART team, focusing on access to a range of permanent housing options for care leavers aged 18+, including reviewing and consolidating the council housing offer at district level.

There has been concerted work over the past year to raise district councils’ awareness of their corporate parenting responsibilities. Most districts have now responded with Chelmsford City Council standing out by setting up a Task & Finish group to consider how children in care and care leavers could be supported at a city council level. The report of the Task and Finish group is attached for information.

Access to permanent housing for care leavers continues to be the most pressing and intractable issue. Although care leavers are a priority group for housing within legislation the pressures on local housing stock are growing and the localism agenda provides loopholes that our care leavers frequently fall victim to. This will only be addressed by continued dialogue and negotiation at a local level.

- XIII. Mental Health Co-ordinators are now allocated across all quadrants, increasing this resource for care leavers. This requires review after 6 months.

Implemented. These posts have been highly successful in providing easily accessible mental health support to young people.

- XIV. The existing Looked After nursing contract already includes provision of a health service up to the age of 19, but this needs to be consistently invoked. This will include the provision of a health passport for all young people leaving care.

The provision up to 19 has been included in the new contracts.

Jenny Boyd
Director of Local Delivery West
5/12/14