

Corporate Parenting Board

Meeting to be held on 17 September 2019

Report of the Head of Service, Children's Social Care

Electoral Division affected: (All divisions)

Ministerial Roundtable Discussion with Personal Advisors – 20 June 2019

(Appendix 'A' refers)

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Executive Summary

This is a summary from the Ministerial Roundtable Discussion with Personal Advisors which was held in London on 20 June 2019. This is a personal account from the two hour session at the Department for Education as the minutes from the session are not available yet.

Recommendation

The Corporate Parenting Board is asked to receive this feedback and comment as appropriate.

Key information for Board members

- In attendance – 16 Personal Advisors from across England, representatives from the care leavers policy team at the Department for Education and Nadhim Zahawi – Minister for Children and Families.
- Rob MacPherson (care leavers policy team Department for Education) introduced the session with a short PowerPoint presentation (Appendix 'A'). I think all Personal Advisors present believed the presentation was based on their own case load! It was accepted that caseloads are too high and resources too low.
- Mark Riddell previous manager of Trafford Leaving Care team and now National Implementation Advisor for Care Leavers was present and spoke about his role in visiting local authorities, gathering examples of good practice and offering advice.
- Nadhim Zahawi was present for the first hour of the meeting and was very keen to hear about Personal Advisors experiences and partnership working particularly with health, adult services, housing and the Department for Work and Pensions. It is evident from the ensuing discussion that there are many differences on how leaving care services and support operates across England. I was able to report the progress that Lancashire has made with housing and the Department for Work and Pensions which benefits from having protocol agreements in place.

The general consensus around the table was the need for working links and dialogue with health and adult services – the minister made a note of this and said he would raise the issue with the relevant government departments.

- There was agreement that many 18 year old care leavers are not ready or have the necessary skills for independent living despite support and services being in place, a combination of probable unsettled care journey/ experience, possible numerous placements, poor or disrupted academic achievement, emotional maturity and not having the opportunity to remain in placement post 18. It was acknowledged that Staying Put has helped address some of these issues and offers continuing stability for those young people who generally tend to be settled, stable and achieving, however this option is not available to all care leavers, arguably the care leavers that need it most? - Vulnerable, isolated, risk takers, under achievers etc. who do not benefit from additional local authority funding. The care system has not kept pace with the change in social trends, for example average age for child leaving the family home is approximately 23 years of age.
- We discussed corporate parenting and the need to ensure all professionals and local authority services understand and accept their responsibility as a corporate parent.
- Leaving Care teams ideally having identified 'Champions' - Workers with specialist knowledge in key areas (i.e. housing, mental health, benefits etc.) who are able to advise colleagues and liaise with professionals from the relevant services. Some of us were able to share how our teams are already trying to achieve this.
- Nadhim Zahawi spoke about Personal Advisor champions having access to elected members holding relevant portfolios. He also suggested that local authority policy and regeneration services need to be develop and build corporate parenting links.
- Leaving Care teams being multi-agency – representatives from services sitting with the team and working as Personal Advisors?
- Discussion took place around the challenge of supporting care leavers who move away from the local authority area and the reluctance of other local authorities to become involved and offer/provide local support. Identified that a great deal of time and resource allocated to providing 'distance' support. The relationship established between Young Person and Personal Advisors can be so positive that it could prove difficult for the support to be transferred. – National Leaving Care Service?
- Social media was talked about – general agreement that local authorities have tended to drag their heels and where it has been used it is with Facebook, a platform that young people have now moved on from preferring WhatsApp, SnapChat and Twitter, Nadhim is very active on Twitter.
- Career progression and advancement opportunities for a Personal Advisor was raised, some authorities employ Senior Personal Advisors and Manager Personal Advisors and many authorities will enable Personal Advisors to start on the same pay scale as a new social worker providing they hold a professional qualification. Increments could be offered as incentives for specific training/ qualifications or specialisms?
- The meeting concluded with the agreement to set up a national virtual reference group with the Personal Advisors present. Rob and Mark will circulate further information in due time.

- For me this was a very enjoyable experience and highlighted the inconsistent approach to leaving care support across the country. The passion to provide the right leaving care service demonstrated by Personal Advisors present was inspiring and it was reassuring to share in our joint experiences and aspirations.