

Corporate Parenting Board

Meeting to be held on Tuesday, 17 September 2019

Report of the Head of Service Children's Social Care North Lancashire

Electoral Division affected: (All Divisions);
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Lancashire's Care Leavers Report

(Appendix 'A' refers)

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Executive Summary

The Ofsted inspection of Safeguarding in 2015 identified a need to improve our support to care leavers in Lancashire. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on how the Lancashire Care Leavers Service has been adapted to improve the offer to care leavers since then and also to make recommendations for further improvement. The report draws from two key sources:

- A review of the current service offer.
- Consultation with care leavers accessing the service and their feedback on the support they receive.

Lancashire's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2018-2022 makes clear our ambition for children and young people who are looked after and this ambition extends to young people who are leaving care.

Within the Corporate Parenting Strategy it states that children looked after are the responsibility of everyone at the council and our partner organisations. Legally, this means being their Corporate Parents. As a Corporate Parent we have the same goals for children in our care and for those moving on to independence.

Our existing Leaving Care Service needs reforming to meet this ambition. After engaging with Care Leavers in a variety of ways including face to face interviews and a questionnaire, and through undertaking a review of the Leaving Care Service this report presents a number of options for improvement.

Recommendations

The Corporate Parenting Board is asked:

- (i) To adopt a revised approach to support care leavers in Lancashire that realises the ambitions set out within the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- (ii) To support the redesign of the Leaving Care Service.
- (iii) To support the actions set out within Appendix 'A' of this report to address the key messages emerging from the service review and consultation with care leavers.

Background and Advice

The issues identified within the Ofsted inspection in 2015 prompted a redesign of the care leaver's service. At the time of inspection, care leavers were supported by generic support workers. In practice, this meant that the workers did not have the specialist skills required to effectively support young people.

To support improvement, in May 2016, a new leaving care service was implemented on a locality basis across Lancashire's Council's footprint to establish three locality teams in Central, East and North of the County. The staffing structure includes dedicated personal advisors along with leaving care social workers working together to create a clear pathway of support for young people leaving care.

A review of the current model is underway to ensure that the objectives of the Corporate Parenting Strategy are being met. An options paper arising from this review will be presented to the new Director of Children's Social Care for decision on 30 September 2019.

The key messages emerging from the service review include:

- Inconsistent practice standards across each locality;
- Inconsistent service offer to Care Leavers across Lancashire;
- No drop in service offer for our Care Leavers across Lancashire.
- No bespoke District Council Housing offer across Lancashire
- Limited partnership working with Health in terms of Mental Health support for over 18's.

The current service structure in the three locality based teams has different team structures and resource allocation. The options paper will include a revised model that addresses the inconsistent leaving care offer across the three localities but will include warranted variation dependent on need.

As part of the review, Care Leavers were consulted about the current services they receive from Lancashire. This involved, 25 Care Leavers in 10 supported accommodation settings consulted face to face by an independent Lancashire County Council officer as well as an electronic Care Leaver Questionnaire. In total, 163 completed questionnaires were received.

There is a clear contrast in views between the face to face consultation and the care leaver questionnaire for example, the views of those consulted face to face by an independent person included:

- The lack of understanding of what support, if any, they had received from Lancashire County Council's Leaving Care Service.
- Where the care leaver had a social worker or a personal advisor they felt unsupported.
- Many care leavers were unclear about their entitlements.

In contrast, the views of those consulted through the care leaver questionnaire on, where care leavers completed the questionnaire with their personal advisor (PA) or social worker included:

- 152 care leavers felt supported by their person advisor.
- 143 care leavers felt their personal advisor was able to help them when they needed help.
- A large proportion of care leavers were aware about some of their entitlements.

It is positive to note our care leavers feel supported by the Leaving Care Service, however, there was a limited response on how they felt supported with more detailed responses from the face to face consultation.

Research has shown, if a questionnaire is completed by a known person to the interviewee, this is likely to cause bias. This may explain the variance between two methods of consultation.

Summary of key findings

The key messages merging from both the service review and the feedback from care leavers has identified some areas for action including:

- Care leavers are not fully aware of the support available to them.
- Care leavers are four times more likely to have mental health issues and are significantly more likely to have physical health problems than their peers.
- Care leavers do not get a consistent service offer from Lancashire.
- Care leavers face the demands of living on their own: having to manage finances, maintain a home and manage their lives independently, often without the support from families that most of us take for granted.
- Nationally the number of homeless Care Leavers (18-25) is increasing with 260 homeless care leavers in 2015 to 300 in 2017.
- The percentage of Care Leavers not in education, employment, or training is above national at 51% compared to 50% nationally.

The objectives of the new service will reflect the ambitions articulated within the Corporate Parenting Strategy so that all our care leavers are:

- better prepared and supported to live independently;
- have improved access to education, employment and training;
- experience stability in their lives and feel safe and secure;
- receive improved access to health support;
- achieve financial stability;
- receive a clear and consistent offer from Lancashire Care Leavers service.

An action plan to address the key findings within this report is attached in Appendix 'A'.