

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

12 October 2016

Subject: Wiltshire Council Services for Care Leavers

Cabinet member: Councillor Laura Mayes – Children’s Services

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary

In the Children and Social Work Bill 2016 Government has signalled a clear intention to extend services offered to care leavers. Central to this is a Care Leavers’ Covenant. This will be a promise, set out in law, to everyone who has been through the care system. This will ensure that every young person who has been in care will be entitled to personalised support until their 25th birthday and every local authority will be expected to publish entitlements leaflets for care leavers making explicit reference to housing, jobs and healthcare.

In the Single Inspection of LA Services in June 2015 Ofsted reported that Wiltshire’s service to care leavers required improvement. Ofsted recognised that children in care receive an improving level of support in their transition into adulthood, that the number of care leavers in education and employment is good and these young adults have their health needs met. Areas to improve included the quality and consistency of Pathway Plans, care leavers knowledge of entitlements and our ability to maintain contact and provide support to older care leavers.

Prior to the Ofsted inspection we had begun to review the effectiveness of services offered to care leavers in Wiltshire. A multi-agency audit had started and subsequently we have worked with Barnardo’s to develop pathway training for Personal Advisor’s and complete a strategic needs analysis of our care leaver population.

This report serves to update Cabinet on the quality and effectiveness of services to care leavers in Wiltshire.

Proposal(s)

It is recommended that the contents of this report are noted and accepted.

Reason for Proposal

Local authorities have duties under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 towards eligible and relevant and former relevant children.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 (the Leaving Care Act) came into effect on the 1 Oct 2001. The Act amends the previous provisions for care leavers in the Children Act 1989. The Act applies in England and Wales only.

The act aims to ensure that a Local Authority will provide help until a Young Person reaches the age of 21 and in some cases 24.

The Leaving Care Act has two main aims:

- To ensure that young people do not leave care until they are ready.
- To ensure that they receive effective support once they have left.

The proposed Care Leavers' Covenant will extend the responsibilities of the Council to all care leavers up until the age of 25 years.

Carolyn Godfrey
Corporate Director

Wiltshire Council

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Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with an overview of the quality of services offered to Wiltshire care leavers and areas where further improvements are required.
2. The report draws upon findings from an audit completed in the Autumn of 2015 and a recent assessment of individual need. Taken together this provides a firm foundation from which to analyse the quality of our offer to care leavers.
3. Through the Children and Social Work Bill 2016 government has signalled a clear intention to require local authorities to improve services to care leavers. This report provides a brief overview of the Bill and begins to consider the impact for Wiltshire Council.

Relevance to the Council’s Business Plan

4. The Wiltshire Council service to care leavers is a central priority as set out in the Wiltshire Council Business Plan 2013-2017 as part of the key priority to protect those who are most vulnerable. Relevant actions include:
 - Help looked after children find employment
 - Improve safeguarding services and help vulnerable children and adults to achieve better outcomes.

The Wiltshire Council Business Plan also aims to create inclusive communities where everyone can achieve their potential. The relevant action is to create a:

- Much narrower achievement and aspiration ‘gap’ for children and young people from vulnerable groups, such as looked-after children...

Main Considerations for the Council

5. Care leavers, as a group, continue to be disadvantaged by their childhood experiences and their lack of familial and other natural support networks. Their transition to interdependent living – living independently, participating in training, continuing in education and moving into employment – often continues to occur simultaneously, much more rapidly and at an earlier age than their non-looked

after peers. Care leavers are effectively forced by circumstance into independence at a much earlier age than other children and young people.

6. Nationally the impact of these circumstances continues to be evidenced in the poorer outcomes demonstrated across the range of areas when compared with their non-looked after peers. Care leavers continue to experience much higher rates of premature mortality, a lack of access to continuing education or training, unemployment, homelessness, poor mental health and physical wellbeing, teenage pregnancy and involvement in the criminal justice system(Dixon 2008, Rainer 2007, Stein 2004, 2005, Stein and Munro 2008, Stein 2012).

7. There are different categories of care leavers depending on age and length of time in care:

- Eligible children - Young people, aged 16 or 17, who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who are currently looked after.
- Relevant children: young people aged 16 or 17 who are now no longer looked after, who were looked after for a total period of 13 weeks after reaching the age of 14, including at least one day while they were 16 or 17. (That is, they were previously eligible children. This category also includes: young people detained in a remand centre, or other custodial institution or in a hospital; young parents; disabled children).
- Additional Relevant Children: children aged 16-17 who immediately before being detained or admitted to hospital were accommodated by a local authority for a period of at least 13 weeks after reaching the age of 14. They will no longer be looked after, and may or may not still be detained or in hospital.
- Former relevant children: young people aged 18-21 who have been either eligible children or relevant children. A young person over 21 who is still receiving support from a local authority with education or training will be in this category until the end of his/her studies. The local authority will continue to owe these duties until the young person turns 21, or 25 if the young person is in further or higher education.

8. The Council's duties to care leavers change dependent upon the child's age and status but in general we have responsibility to:

- make sure that a pathway plan is in place by the young person's 16th birthday
- complete an 'Assessment of Need' for the care leaver prior to their 16th birthday
- provide financial support
- provide the care leaver with a personal adviser, whose role it is to advise and support the young person, liaise with other relevant agencies, and implement and monitor the pathway plan
- ensure accommodation is provided.

9. The key assessment tool used when working with care leavers is the pathway plan. This plan should consider the young person's need for support and assistance and how best to meet these needs until the age of 21 (or longer if the young person is in education or training). Areas covered should include:

- accommodation.
- practical life skills including money management
- education and training.
- employment.
- financial support.
- specific support needs.
- contingency plans for support if independent living breaks down.

10. Taken together these elements are intended to provide a full package of support to the young person to enable them to make the transition from care to living independently.

11. In Wiltshire services to care leavers are co-ordinated through two Children in Care Team's; we do not have a separate, specialist service for care leavers. Consultation with care leavers confirms the value that they place on continuity of care and relationships; we have designed our service to reflect this. Personal advisors (PA) work alongside social workers in the Children in Care Teams with young people from the age of 15.5 years at which point they begin to develop the child's Pathway Plan. The PA becomes the case holder once the child turns 18 but in many cases they are effectively the lead professional at an early stage.

12. The "Care Leavers Covenant" announced in the Queen's Speech and included in the 2016 Bill will require local authorities to consult on and publish a 'local offer' to care leavers setting out all the services that they are entitled to. This is similar to that required of local authorities for children with special educational needs after the Children and Families Act 2014.

13. The Bill is very light on the detail of what might be included in the "Care Leavers Covenant". Further detail at an early stage in form of additional guidance from DfE is anticipated and will help inform planning locally. Although primary responsibility for delivery of services will sit with the Council, the Bill recognises that many other stakeholders, both within the public and third sector, have a key role to play in the fulfilment of corporate parenting duties and the delivery of services to care leavers. How Government will assist to incentivise these other agencies has yet to be addressed.

14. In Wiltshire we have already consulted with a wide range of statutory partners across health, education and housing. Our audit in 2015 of over 20 different council departments and other agencies found that the majority of services recognise the vulnerability of care leavers and promote their services to them. While this is positive in reality this has yet to deliver a suitably diverse and responsive range of service provision. Critically few agencies provide care leavers with an automatic entitlement to services and the extent to which services / organisations create favourable supposition is small. The favourable supposition principle is likely to be included as a pre-requisite in any Care Leaver Covenant; this will require that where discretion exists in definitions of vulnerability or in giving priority access the relevant agency will **create a favourable supposition** that these are exercised in favour of care leavers.

15. The proposed legislation extends the right to a personal adviser, someone who will make sure care leavers receive the support they need as they transition into adulthood, to every care leaver that wants one up to the age of 25. In Wiltshire this will effectively double the number of Care Leavers that we support taking the total to somewhere near 400. In these circumstances the current average caseload for a PA will increase from 22 to nearer 40, this will not be manageable or enable service improvements to be achieved. We are considering a range of options including working in partnership with trusted adults within each care leaver's network. This would see the Council devolve responsibility for some PA functions to the 'trusted adult'. The key advantage to the care leaver is that the 'trusted adult' will likely remain a significant figure in their life far longer than the PA would. Until we see the statutory guidance attached to the 2016 Bill we are unsure whether this type of initiative will be allowed. Without this a significant increase in PA resource will be required.

16. The care leaver needs analysis completed in the Spring of 2016 grouped care leavers into three bands; high support (31%), medium support (45%) and low support (24%). In determining banding a measure of need was taken from across seven domains:

1. Accommodation
2. Finance
3. Employment and Training
4. Risk/Vulnerability
5. Independence Skills
6. Engagement and Capacity
7. Social Inclusion

17. Those who are settled (low) do well across all the domains and require very little PA support (less than 30 mins a fortnight). Those in the medium band are reported to have more significant 'maintenance needs' which require regular support, visits and intervention via the PA with chronic difficulty in at least three areas. Those in the high support band are described as being in acute crisis in at least one domain to an extent that imminent significant disruption is anticipated. Of note is that over a third (almost one half) of high needs care leavers are under 18 years.

18. Vulnerability, Employment and Training, and Accommodation are the three domains where greatest need have been identified, these three areas are interlinked. While the number of care leavers who are employed or in education compare favourably with national averages, PAs commit significant time to support care leavers to remain in education and employment placements. In 25% of cases the location of housing is a significant factor; the lack of a sufficient range of housing options means that care leavers are placed outside their community or in inappropriate housing and therefore easily become socially isolated. Almost one third of care leavers in the high or medium band have significant attachment problems or complex emotional/mental health needs. When combined these factors can lead to acute crisis and PAs will spend a disproportionate amount of their time responding to these.

19. The service is responding in a number of ways to these challenges.

20. Post 16 Virtual School Officers working from Aspire House now have lead responsibility for developing an Education to Employment Pathway for care leavers. Our intention is to deliver a wider range of work options and supports that the care leaver or employer can access. Through a satellite function of Aspire House we will pilot an outreach surgery in the South of the county so that care leavers and PAs have local access to the additional support that the post 16 VSO can offer. We are also considering how best to further develop the range of services offered from Aspire House; one option would be to develop a One Stop Shop approach, utilising Aspire House as a hub from which to deliver some services to care leavers. This might include a crisis or duty PA service, surgeries through which there is access to housing, benefits and health services, and a range of independence support services.

21. We are overhauling Pathway Plans and combining these with Care Plans into a single continuous assessment. Transition from care to care leaver is not a linear process and our approach to assessment needs to reflect this. The new combined assessment will enable social workers and PAs to work together to assess need and create more flexibility in the way in which we manage the transition from care to independence. These new plans are currently being piloted within the two Children in Care Teams and will be introduced through the Barnardo's training referred to in paragraph 22.

22. Currently there is no nationally recognised or accredited training pathway for PAs and as a result achieving a consistent approach to this work can be challenging. Working with Barnardo's the Council will pilot a comprehensive training programme for PAs later in the Autumn. If successful Barnardo's will seek to have the training accredited and endorsed by DfE before making it available to other local authorities. This training is based on a programme that Barnardo's has already delivered within its own projects, these have been subject to inspection by Ofsted and reports are favourable. Core elements of this training cover:

- Managing transitions
- Pathway planning
- Partnership working
- Child and adolescent development
- Recording and communication
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
- Mental health
- Education, employment, training and skills
- Accommodation and life skills
- Offending and custody

23. The training will be delivered through 10 workshops running on a fortnightly basis. PA's will be released in groups to attend; we anticipate all PA's completing the workshops within a 9 month period. Costs for trainers and the commitment Wiltshire will be required to provide to support evaluation and future development have yet to be agreed with Barnardo's.

24. Wiltshire's future Housing Strategy is in development and there is now the opportunity to review status and access that care leavers have to housing options. It is recognised that as a Council we are a corporate parent to our care leavers and Housing are keen to work with partners to assist in the development of options to ensure they have the choice of affordable accommodation as well as receiving appropriate support. Housing are in the process of reviewing our Allocations Policy and as previously recommended are considering placing Care Leavers into our highest priority band. This will be consulted on towards the end of 2016 for adoption from 1st April 2017. Housing have also included care leavers as a priority in our Housing Strategy which is shortly due to go out to formal consultation. Care Leavers will be considered as part of our Housing related Support Review which is due to be completed mid-2017.

25. Working with housing we plan to identify a number of options such as shared accommodation in both the private and social sector by working with our housing providers and local landlords to determine a suitable package that will encourage them to develop or pilot accommodation for young people. Selwood Housing already have two 2 bed properties that are being used as shared accommodation for young people and this is considered as a pilot to see if it works. We will be attending our Strategic Housing Partnership meeting in October to discuss the concept of shared accommodation further. Work is underway to develop alternative options for accommodation such as long term leasing or capital investment to help reduce revenue expenditure going forward.

Safeguarding Implications

27. The new duties on local authorities to support care leavers will help to prepare care leavers for adulthood and promote their welfare.

Public Health Implications

28. Looked after children and care leavers experience significant inequalities in health compared to their peers and therefore their health and wellbeing needs to be prioritised. A review of current support for care leavers with regard to health and wellbeing advice and assessment of need would be recommended along with consideration of any additional opportunities to incorporate health improvement within existing and planned package of support (see para 22 above). The recommendation here is to incorporate public health skills and competencies within the PA training

Corporate Procurement Implications

29. Any contractual requirements awarded to meet the needs of this service shall be undertaken in accordance with the council's Procurement and Contracts Rules as set out in Part 10 of the council's Constitution. The training programme delivered through Barnardo's as set out in section 23 will be subject to exemption requiring approval by key council officers including Accountancy, Legal and Procurement as per the procurement rules described above.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

30. The development of a “Care Leavers Covenant” will need to be developed in tandem with an Equality Impact Analysis in order to evaluate the impacts on both service users and staff, relating specifically to the 9 protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

31. There are no significant environmental and climate change considerations. The Sustainable Growth Team will be kept informed of any potential service changes that may have environmental implications.

Risk Assessment

32. Failure to respond to the requirements of the Children and Social Work Bill (2016), including implementing the Care Leavers’ Covenant, could create risks including: not reducing the achievement and aspiration gap between vulnerable young people and all young people (a stated aim in the council’s Business Plan) and higher future costs for the council and other public services created by care leavers becoming vulnerable adults.

33. There is no decision required and therefore no directly linked risks.

Financial Implications

34. A range of future funding arrangements are being modelled by the project group, with due diligence by Accountancy. A detailed options paper arising from that modelling will be presented to Cabinet in due course. It is understood that full costs will be need to met from existing base budget / government grant.

35. Currently there is no decision required by Cabinet and therefore no directly linked risks.

Legal Implications

36. The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that children in care and former children in care receive appropriate support in their transition into adulthood. This report updates Cabinet on proposed changes to this service both because of the Council’s drive for continual improvement and in anticipation of impending legislative changes.

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Background Papers and Appendices: None