



# Northumberland

## County Council

### **Families and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**

**Date: 6th December 2018**

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#### **Peer Review for Care Leavers Service**

Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services, Cath McEvoy Carr

Cabinet Member for Children's Services: Councillor Wayne Daley

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#### **Purpose of report**

To provide the members with an overview of the recent Peer Challenge undertaken focussing on the services to care leavers including the context of Peer Challenges, how it was undertaken, the findings and next steps.

#### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that:

- 1) Members note the purpose of the peer challenge and the outcomes from this.
- 2) Members note that an action plan has been developed from this and request a report on progress against the actions within it after six months.

#### **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to the; Love where you are living, Enjoy, achieve & reach your potential, Feel safe and cared for, and Connecting and learning priorities all included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2021.

#### **Key Issues**

1. A Peer Challenge for the services to care leavers was identified as an opportunity to take stock of changes made since the 2016 Ofsted inspection found that services for care leavers required improvement.
2. The Peer Challenge was originally due to take place in February but adverse weather caused it to be postponed until September.
3. The Peer Challenge team, consisting of three senior staff from other local authorities and a Local Government Association coordinator, spent two days in Northumberland. During this time they met with managers and staff from

across services working with care leavers, met with a number of care leavers, audited case records and observed visits and meetings.

4. At the end of the two days the team fed back to the Executive Director of Children's Services, Head of Service and Senior Manager for NAS. This feedback is detailed further below but key positives were that leaders knew the service well and what further work was needed and that young people fed back positively about their workers now and the service they received. Recommendations included further work on improving opportunities for employment and training for care leavers recognising the corporate parenting role the wider council has in this and to consider the transition arrangements for young people into and within the service.
5. Following the challenge the service has drawn up an action plan which will take forward the recommendations made. It would be positive if this group could receive reports on the progress made as part of its scrutiny role.

## BACKGROUND

The Peer Challenge process now adopted by the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) group in the North East, builds on the peer review model that was developed by the Local Government Association (LGA).

In order to support the Peer Challenge process all Local Authorities have nominated key members from their senior leadership teams including their Director of Children's Services (DCS) to be trained in the Peer Challenge process and to lead Peer Challenges. Peer challengers have either undertaken regional training or are LGA accredited peer reviewers.

The Peer Challenge in Northumberland was provided by a team led by:

- Sally Robinson, Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services, Hartlepool Borough Council
- Jane Young, Assistant Director, Children's Services, Hartlepool Borough Council
- Paul Brownlee, Service Manager, Young People's Services, Newcastle City Council
- The overall process was managed and coordinated by Jill Emery, Director, Impact Change Solutions.

The team spent two days working in the Leaving Care Service collecting evidence with which to frame their findings and then drew together and presented their conclusions on day three of the Challenge. On the lead up to the challenge Northumberland shared a wide range of information with the team to support its preparations and co-produced a timetable which ensured that the team was able to meet an appropriate range of young people, foster carers, colleagues and partners.

As well as a desk-based analysis of documentation, the Peer Challenge process included a wide range of on-site activities, with over 50 participants. These activities included a review of cases with social workers, meetings with Wayne Daley, Cath McEvoy Carr, team managers and observation of review/handover meetings as well as time with young people.

As a result of those activities they identified over 60 strengths and areas for consideration, which were refined and matched against the scope of the Challenge, as well as a 'headline' strengths and areas for consideration section. Further in the report will provide a general overview of those areas.

The panel of reviewers were asked to observe the following areas within that service:

- The quality of the planning process including the involvement of young people in the process
- The young person's plan with specific focus on education, employment and training
- How well transitions into adulthood is managed
- The level and quality of contact between the social worker and young person
- Health history information
- How performance data can be developed and used to improve the service
- How involved young people are in shaping the care leavers service as a whole
- Progress on the implementation of care leavers entitlement

During the course of the peer challenge, additional themes were explored which contribute to the Care Leavers Service. These were:

- Corporate Parenting
- Care Leavers Experience

Feedback in part regarding strengths of the service:

- 1) Staff are motivated, passionate and committed to their roles with a clear focus on supporting the young people they work with.
- 2) There is clear evidence of an improving service for care leavers and a desire within the workforce to build on this and improve the lives of young people.
- 3) Young people speak positively about their workers and felt that they engage well with them.
- 4) A strong integrated working model within Northumberland Adolescent Service (NAS) is ensuring that there are joined up services when needed.
- 5) The workforce is committed, motivated, passionate and they know their young people well. There is a clear willingness to learn and improve the services provided to young people leaving care.
- 6) There is a positive, 'can-do' attitude and shared responsibility for meeting the needs of young people across the team which ensures that there is a holistic approach to delivering care and support for young people leaving care.
- 7) The quality of assessments and pathway planning is improving with emerging practice around contingency planning.
- 8) All 18+ Care Leavers have a health passport which also includes a discharge summary from CYPS.
- 9) The pathway plans that were seen recognise both the physical and emotional health needs of young people leaving care.
- 10) Young people found that Voices Making Choices is good for letting you know what you can do and some were active members of this group.
- 11) Welfare rights information to care leavers has improved through the meeting of the Finance Panel. Young people approaching 18 were identified and assisted in registering for benefits.
- 12) From a Corporate Parenting perspective there is political support for ensuring looked after children and young people have the right pathway to succeed in being the best they can be.
- 13) There is a strong, well-informed Lead Member who is strengthening scrutiny and accountability by looking at how the Corporate Parenting Group can be improved.

**Recommendations in part for consideration:**

- 1) Consider the number of worker transition points from a young person's perspective as they move through the service.
- 2) Reflect on the compliance culture that has been necessary to improve standards and performance and consider how to develop the workforce towards increased professional autonomy and use of professional judgement.
- 3) Ensure that the emotional wellbeing and mental health of looked after children and care leavers is considered in any service review and that appropriate support is provided at all levels.
- 4) Develop Pathway plans to be more forward looking for young people reflecting their ambition and aspiration and supporting them to forward plan to achieve this. Currently, plans are written in both first and third person but do not read as being in the young person's voice. Provide clarity on what is expected and examples of best practice in pathway planning.
- 5) Strengthen the recording of supervision to provide a more formal structured record within the system. The current arrangements do not always comply with standards in terms of timeliness, records appear quite task orientated and do not demonstrate reflective supervision. This has been recognised by managers and workers report that they do receive reflective supervision but this is not captured on the system.
- 6) Review the formal management oversight of missing episodes and responsiveness to individual vulnerabilities for young people. Ensure that workers are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities when a young person on their caseload goes missing and take action appropriately in line with the young person's needs.
- 7) Accelerate work to realise participation ambition, where care leavers influence how services are designed and delivered. Strengthen the use of available resources and networks such as the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum to support this area of work.
- 8) Improve the evidence of management oversight and decision making in records. Although the team were told that this does happen it is not always being recorded in the young person's record.
- 9) Review the audit tool to focus on intervention, impact and outcomes. The audit tool is currently compliance focussed and could be improved by evaluating the quality and impact of social work practice and how this has contributed to improved outcomes for the young person.
- 10) Assure ourselves that the proposed restructure to a 16+ service will not have unintended consequences by reducing capacity in the locality teams to meet the needs of younger looked after children and that these children continue to receive a high priority service. The review team's analysis of future caseload capacity within the 16+ service indicates there could be capacity for a dedicated 14+ looked after service which retains the integrated specialist support offer from NAS for these young people.
- 11) Take steps to ensure that young people can access the NAS Service offices. The team heard that this was a long-standing problem but a solution needs to be expedited to enable young people easy access to the services and people they

need.

- 12) Promote a whole-council ambition and aspiration for looked after children and care leavers. Corporately, there is more the council can do to be ambitious for care leavers as the Corporate Parent and ensure that every care leaver is given the best of opportunity.
- 13) Corporate Parents - Identify apprenticeships for care leavers within the council and provide support to them through the apprenticeship mentoring scheme. Although the council runs an apprenticeship scheme with a pledge to have 400 apprenticeships by 2020 there are no ring-fenced apprenticeships for care leavers or target for the number of apprenticeships the council is ambitious to fill with care leavers. We were told that there are currently between 1 and 3 apprenticeships filled by care leavers.
- 14) Ensure that the corporate parenting role and responsibility is prominent across all directorates and commissioned services. This will involve looking at the wide range of strategies implemented by the council, for example, housing to ensure that care leavers are included in any impact assessments. Similarly when commissioning services the needs of care leavers should be included in specification documents.

## **CONCLUSION**

An honest and frank account was given to the Peer Challenge team. A presentation was delivered to the team where we advised NAS's areas for development. Fortunately there were no surprises when we received our feedback, the above outlines some of the key findings both strengths and areas for improvement. Initial feedback received outlined that our preparation for the peer challenge was good and immensely helpful in enabling the reviewers to focus its activity appropriately. It was evident to the team that all the staff they met were committed to improvement and continued development. An action plan is being developed which incorporates the teams findings to improve services across NAS. The Peer Challenge has been received by the teams positively and given them ownership of areas to develop. We have already listened and instigated changes in line with the transitional points for care leavers.

## IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

<b>Policy:</b>	To ensure that care leavers are considered as a priority group in all council policies moving forward.
<b>Finance and value for money:</b>	To implement some of the recommendations particularly in relation to a meaningful apprenticeship programme which would have a graduated approach may have financial implications in required support for young people. However, success of these would have a wider financial benefit for the community if young people become successful employees.
<b>Legal:</b>	The local authority has a statutory duty to provide support for care leavers until they are 21 or 25 in higher education or request that support
<b>Procurement:</b>	N/A
<b>Human Resources:</b>	N/A
<b>Property:</b>	NA
<b>Equalities:</b> (Impact Assessment attached)  <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> to be completed	
<b>Risk Assessment:</b>	N/A
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder:</b>	Young people who have been looked after are statistically more likely to be represented in the justice system including custody. Providing high quality support and meaningful education, employment and training opportunities can help to reduce this risk
<b>Customer Considerations:</b>	The local authority is the corporate parent for Looked After Children and care leavers. All council officers and members should have aspirations for this group of children and young people and be actively seeking to support them.
<b>Carbon Reduction:</b>	N/A
<b>Wards:</b>	All

**Report sign off**

Finance Officer	N/A
Monitoring Officer/Legal	N/A
Human Resources	N/A
Procurement	N/A
I.T.	N/A
Executive Director of Children's Services	CM
Portfolio Holder(s)	WD

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Report Author: Mary Connor, Acting Head of Service, Early Help, Prevention and Support Services

(01670) 620349 mary.connor@[northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:mary.connor@northumberland.gov.uk)