



Northumberland County Council

Families and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee **Date: 6th June 2019**

Peer Review for Care Leavers Service-update report

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

Cabinet Member for Children's Services: Councillor Wayne Daley

Purpose of report

To provide the members with an update of the actions to be undertaken following the Peer Challenge undertaken in September 2018 including a current view of the education, employment and training status of Northumberland's care leavers.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- 1) Members are assured that there is an action plan in place to take forward the areas for improvement highlighted by the challenge.
- 2) Members continue to ask for updates in relation to care leavers as part of their corporate parenting role.

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 focussing on care leavers took place in September 2018. Following this an action plan to take forward areas for improvement was drawn up.
2. Progress against all areas of the action plan has been noted and some actions have been completed.

3. Actions in some areas have been slower as a result of staffing capacity issues within the service.
4. Through more focussed actions a tighter grip is being given to understanding the barriers to care leavers accessing education employment and training. A specific action plan to look at this has been put in place.

BACKGROUND

A previous report was provided to this committee in December 2018 outlining the purpose of peer challenges and the focus of the peer challenge in Northumberland which took place in September 2018 over a two day period.

There were a significant number of strengths identified during the course of the challenge and the peer challenge team fed back that managers in the service understood the challenges and areas for improvement still to progress.

Managers across the Northumberland Adolescent Service have been part of drawing up an action plan based on the areas for improvement identified from the challenge. This has been coordinated by the senior manager for the service and is reviewed regularly by the Head of Service with the managers.

This committee asked that a further update was brought back for members including more detail in relation to the education, employment and training status of Northumberland's care leavers.

Key actions progressed as a result of the peer challenge recommendations:

- 1) The decision has been made to continue with the transition of children in permanent looked after arrangements at the age of 14 to cut down on the number of transitions in a short space of time. These transitions have now started to happen from the locality teams.
- 2) The service is recruiting to a mental health practitioner post which will receive clinical supervision from staff in NTW but be based whole time with NAS. There are also avenues being explored through the educational psychologist resource within the Virtual School and the access to counselling support resources through NALS. There continues to be further work needed in this area.
- 3) Pathway Plans are now being written to reflect the voice of the young person incorporating the feedback which they give through use of Mind of My Own. There is a new audit framework in place within NAS using a specific audit tool to quality assure pathway plans.
- 4) All return home interviews for children reported missing are now to be conducted by youth service staff. This will enable better join up of risk issues identified from these across the service.
- 5) The participation service is in the process of recruiting additional staff to create additional capacity. The care leavers local offer page on the NCC website has been updated based on young people's feedback to make it more accessible to

young people. Care leavers are involved in developing learning tools for independent living and delivering training for foster carers.

- 6) Access to space in Northumbria House is now set up and there are specified days and times when young people can access meeting room space there. There is also work ongoing with Active Northumberland to support young people's access to meeting facilities in leisure buildings.
- 7) Work has started on a range of opportunities to support care leavers into employment and education within the various directorates across NCC. NALS have developed a graduated approach for access to apprenticeships with a number of these ring fenced for care leavers. The specialist careers advisors within the virtual school are going to be highlighting young people in Year 9 who are interested in apprenticeships in particular areas to enable NALS to plan for these. Staff from the care leavers service will present information about care leavers to the NCC staff undertaking the corporate management training programmes to promote understanding of care leavers and support the corporate parenting responsibility across the whole council. The council has signed up to the care leavers covenant.
- 8) Care leavers living in Northumberland will now be exempt from paying council tax from the age of 18 until 21 years and up to 25 years in some circumstances (for example - low income).
- 9) Some actions have not progressed as quickly as would have been wanted because of capacity issues within the social work team, both frontline staff and managers. Work is ongoing to resolve these but the service and managers are aware that this has impacted on the speed of delivery of some aspects of the action plan.

CONCLUSION

The peer challenge was a positive process and highlighted areas for improvement, most of which we were aware of, and some suggestions about how we could make services better.

As a result the service has been continuing to develop and has further linked with other parts of children's services and other areas of the council to develop the corporate offer we will provide to our care leavers.

We will continue to work on both the overall action plan and the specific area in relation to education, employment and training to provide our care leavers with every support and opportunity to reach their potential.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Education, Employment and Training (EET) data in relation to care leavers

IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

Policy:	To ensure that care leavers are considered as a priority group in all council policies moving forward.
Finance and value for money:	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.
Legal:	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
Procurement:	N/A
Human Resources:	N/A
Property:	NA
Equalities: (Impact Assessment attached) <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes to be completed	
Risk Assessment:	N/A
Crime & Disorder:	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
Customer Considerations:	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.
Carbon Reduction:	N/A
Wards:	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	CMC
Portfolio Holder(s)	WD

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