
Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – 11th November 2020

Report of the Acting Director of Children's Services

Children in Care and Care Leaver Service – Care Leavers Update Report

Purpose

1. This report is to provide scope and detail around Dudley's Care Leavers

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that:
 - The Committee note and comment on the content of the update on the Care Leaver's Service

Background

3. A Care Leaver is defined as 16 to 25 years old who has been looked after at some point since they were 14 years old, and they were in care on or after their 16th birthday. Care Leavers are entitled to ongoing support from Children's Services after they leave care at 18. Local Authorities are 'corporate parents' to children in care and to their care leavers. Dudley currently has 129 16 to 18 years old, and 231 18 to 25 years old, a total of 360 care leavers. These young people are referred to as care experienced adults.
- 3.1 The Care Leavers' strategy (2016) 'Keep on Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence', outlined new ways of working with young people via 5 key outcome areas, that Dudley should seek to achieve for all young people leaving care:
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 - Be better prepared and supported to live independently
 - Have improved access to education, training and employment
 - Experience stability and feel safe and secure
 - Receive improved access to health support

- Achieve Financial Stability.

3.2 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 came into effect on 1st April 2018 and strengthened corporate parenting duties within LA's. There is now a requirement for all Local Authorities to publish a 'Local Offer to Care Leavers'. In addition, there has been an extension of the role and remit of a Personal Adviser, which must now be available to offer support to young people leaving care up to their 25th birthday at their request. There is also an annual keeping in touch duty to all who are now aged over 21.

3.3 In Dudley the Care Leavers team consists of 16 full time Young person advisor's (YPA), 1 Social worker and 2 team managers.

The functions of the YPA's role is clearly set out, and how it supports its care leavers. This is set out in statutory guidance meaning this is what the LA must do as a minimum requirement to support its care leavers.

Regulation 8 of the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 details the role of a Personal Adviser (YPA) and sets out its functions which are as follows: -

- To provide advice (including practice advice) and support
- To participate in the assessment and the preparation of the pathway plan
- To participate in reviews of the plan
- To liaise with the responsible authority in implementing the plan
- To coordinate provision of services to support the young person
- To keep informed about the relevant child's or former relevant child's progress and well-being
- To have a written record of contact with and of services provided by the relevant or former relevant child.

3.4 All care leavers should be aware of who their YPA is, so that they are able to rely on consistent support from their own key professional. It is good practice that they retain the same YPA, as when they were a relevant or eligible child. The transfer of support from the social worker to the YPA should take place in a planned and managed way when they reach the age of 18. Dudley aim to allocate a YPA to all Care Leavers at 16 years 5months, this YPA then remains with the young person post 18 years old.

YPA duties post 18 years include: -

- To Provide general assistance
- To Provide assistance with expenses associated with employment
- To Provide assistance associated with education and training
- To Provide vacation accommodation to care leavers in higher or further education
- To Provide a bursary (£2000) to care leavers going on to higher education

3.5 There are some very good initiatives in Dudley, for instance the Council Tax exemption policy for care leavers up to 25 if they live in Dudley, this sends a strong

message from elected members, the Chief Executive and senior officers. The corporate parenting strategy was recently updated to strengthen corporate parenting principles.

- 3.6 Dudley currently has 16 young people at university studying courses from Social Work Degree to Masters in advanced Chemistry. We have young people working in a variety of roles, Sales, children's nurseries, a lawyer, health and social care. Some of our care leavers have themselves become carers for their sibling's, offering their siblings a stable home environment, by working in partnership with social workers.

Each year several young people successfully enter into higher education, which could be via university or remaining at college and doing a course which can lead to entry to university. To enable young people to achieve this without being disadvantaged the following financial support is given to them: -

- Accommodation- which could be halls of residence or a flat and includes administration fees/ deposits and rent.
 - A television licence for the first year.
 - The cost of setting up their accommodation if not furnished.
 - Payment of rates.
 - Specialist books/equipment.
 - Travel costs if remaining at home by way of bus/train pass or petrol allowance if they have a car.
4. On average, caseloads last year for YPA's were around 29 to 31 but they are now working to around 23 to 25 maximum, which is allowing them to do meaningful work and maintain good performance around timeliness of pathway plans and visits to young people. We are working towards YPA's caseloads being around 20. We currently have 45 16 years old who are waiting to be allocated a YPA. Until then, they remain allocated to a social worker. Each team manager gives supervision and management oversight monthly to all the YPA's, and the social workers, this is at times a challenge for the two team managers in post.
- 4.1 The proportion of care leavers accessing Education, Employment and Training (EET) demonstrates 50% of care leavers aged 19 to 21 years old. This shows half of Dudley's care leavers aged 18 to 20 care leaver cohort is without education, employment or a training opportunity and likely to be reliant on state support or have increasing need to gain support from the leaving care service, which creates additional dependency and increased costs on budgets. The EET data 4 years ago showed that the national average was 45%; from the current return, nationally it is possible to see that this bar is raised. The figure for Dudley care leavers has fallen to 50% and is lower than the West Midland average of 51%.

- 4.2 The Black Country Impact is commissioned to work with 13 to 29 year olds. They do not solely work with care leavers nor do they work outside of the borough. This means that there is no dedicated EET worker / Careers Adviser to care leavers or such worker sitting within leaving care. There was a dedicated worker from The Black County Impact working with care leavers in 2018, when Ofsted visited and is clear from the data this position needs to be revisited and considered again. It is noted that due to the pandemic and issues relating to Covid-19 we predict more challenges ahead for our care leavers around this issue.
- 4.3 Prior to the pandemic, care leavers had a weekly drop-in service at the Switch building in the town centre. Since the pandemic it has been difficult to secure a venue to hold a drop-in service for care leavers, and this is currently being considered by the senior leadership team.

Care leavers would like to have a base they can use as a daily drop in to meet with their YPA or duty worker at times of crisis or challenge. A care leaver drop-in centre is somewhere that care leavers can access to have a hot drink, make a meal and have a chat or get advice. We are mindful that during the pandemic care leavers have needed the support of the care leavers team more than ever. Visiting to care leavers has increased, as at times they have needed the additional support, and we have also increased our virtual contact via WhatsApp, that was on all workers phones at the start of the pandemic. WhatsApp has proven to be a very popular way for care leavers to communicate with staff. We have noticed an increase in engagement and communication from the young people via this app. A drop-in centre would also prove valuable during these times for care leavers to be able to walk in and see a member of staff as and when they needed. This service is something that we want to get reinstated quickly.

- 4.4 Currently we are looking to review the Pledge and Local Offer for care leavers. We are considering for two care leavers to be employed to support the review of these important policies.

We believe care experienced young people would be the best voice to ensure these documents capture the needs of children in care and care leavers. We would like them to engage as many care leavers and children in the development work, to capture the current wants and views of the care leavers and children in care cohort, and to be the lead in engaging young people and children in all aspects of participation for a 3 month period. This will culminate in the development of an updated Pledge and Local Offer for Care Leavers. This would also give two care leavers work experience for 3 months, that they can then reflect on their CV's going forward.

Finance

5. There are no cost implications arising from this report.

Law

6. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Equality Impact

7. The Care Leavers Team provide support to the whole community including a range of diverse groups. Good quality practice will be more attuned to the equality issues experienced by individuals, families and communities. Effective oversight and challenge will assist with the development of high-quality practice.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

8. There are no organisational development/HR implications arising from this report.

Commercial/Procurement

9. There are no Commercial/Procurement implications arising from this report.

Health, Wellbeing and Safety

10. Good practice will support the health and wellbeing of children young people and families who access services. In addition, a positive organisational learning culture reduces staff burn out and sickness levels and increases general and emotional wellbeing.



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