



Report to the Children's Social Care and Learning Select Committee

Title:	Support for Care Leavers
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Cabinet Member sign-off:	Cllr Warren Whyte

1.0 Purpose of Agenda Item

This item is to supply the Select Committee with information regarding the work of Children's Services and the support to young people in care and as they leave care.

2.0 Background

This matter has not been discussed previously with the Select Committee.

3.0 Summary

Care Services in Buckinghamshire were re-organised last year. In April and May 2017 a review of Children in Care and Aftercare Services was undertaken so that in early June 2017 the two services became integrated and known as the Care Management Service. Instead of 5 small Children in Care Units and one countywide Aftercare Team, there are now two larger teams based in North and South Buckinghamshire with Children in Care social workers and Personal Advisers under a Team Manager, with a dedicated Assistant Team Manager for each strand of the service. The rationale for this change was to improve the journey of the child towards and after adulthood with the requisite knowledge of the child and young adult's life experience held within the one service which reduces the barriers to achieve a seamless transition.

Feedback from staff in the two teams indicates that there is an improved understanding of the young people's needs and circumstances as they transfer towards the Aftercare part of

the service. There is, however, more work to do to improve the quality and consistency of management oversight, decision making, assessment and care planning processes to improve overall outcomes for the young person. The Ofsted inspection report (29th January 2018) outlined the improvements that are required and this has been reflected in the Ofsted Improvement Plan.

4.0 Legislative Framework for Aftercare Services

Before the Leaving Care Act (2000), there was no statutory framework in place for care leavers and so each local authority made its own determination about what level of support it provided. With no nationally-set expectation many care leavers only received minimal assistance. In 2000, The Leaving Care Act were introduced and placed a statutory requirement for local authorities to:

- Assess the needs of the young person once they left care;
- Appoint a Personal Advisor (PA); and,
- Develop a Pathway Plan

Support became available to care leavers at age 18 and up until age 21, if the young person remained in education.

In 2008, the Children and Young Persons Act introduced requirements for local authorities to provide assistance to care leavers in respect of education (including a £2,000 bursary for those in higher education); and extended the support provided by a PA to the age of 21 for all care leavers; and to 25 if they remained in education.

This age limit is currently under review as part of the Department for Education's (July 2016) initiative 'Keep on Caring, Supporting Young People from Care to Independence'. The proposal is that all care leavers will be eligible for Aftercare support until the age of 25, whether or not they are in education. This will inevitably have some resource implications for the authority.

5.0 The Buckinghamshire Offer

In Buckinghamshire, a PA is allocated and introduced to children in care at age 16. The PA then supports the young person to register for housing so that they are prepared by age 18 to secure their own tenancy. The PA will then have some on-going contact with the young person alongside their allocated Social Worker until they are 17.5 years old. The involvement of the PA is then increased until 18 years old when the young person is transferred to the Aftercare Service and their PA takes full responsibility for supporting the care leaver into adulthood. Where a young person has additional needs, such as a

learning, physical or sensory disability or mental health illness, the young person may also receive additional support from the Adult and Family Wellbeing Transitions Service if the young person meets their criteria. The PA will remain involved and co-work with the Transitions Service to ensure all the additional needs are addressed.

Younger children come into care for a variety of reasons, including when they have been abused and neglected and their birth parents have been unable to provide 'good enough' care. Older children can also become looked after for these reasons too but are also more likely to enter care as a result of being:

- a homelessness 16 or 17 year old
- an accompanied asylum seeker
- remanded into care

Young people leaving care have a wide variety of needs and circumstances which will have been influenced by their childhood experiences of living with their birth family and also living in care. For example, young people who have been in care since they were small children will be well versed in what it means to have a social worker, personal advisors, statutory review meetings and care / pathway plans. Older young people who enter care for the first time at 16 or 17 because they are homeless, sometimes find the experience of being in care interfering and irrelevant. Given the range of pre-care and in-care experiences there is no 'one size fits all' approach to supporting care leavers.

Care leavers in England currently have a range of entitlements set out in legislation to ensure that they receive the support they need when they become adults – just as any child needs. Care leavers can be more vulnerable in society sometimes due to the past trauma they may have suffered but also because they may have no family to support them.

6.0 Pathway Plans

The PA will attend the young person's Child Looked After Statutory Review Meetings and contribute observations and views to help progress the care planning process in the lead up to their 18th birthday and the point of transfer to the Aftercare Service.

A Pathway Plan is written with the young person at age 16 and then reviewed every 6 months by the young person's Social Worker, the Independent Reviewing Officer and is shared with the PA. The Pathway Plan must be person centred and reflect the young person's views, wishes and feelings. It should address any additional needs, reflect their cultural, religious and language needs, identify any risks and protective factors and address any concerns that the young person, and those working with them, consider relevant.

The Pathway Plan is signed by the young person, the Social Worker and Team Manager if under 18; the young person, PA and Assistant Team Manager if over 18. The Team Manager oversees the progression of the plan. The plan continues to be reviewed every 6 months to ensure that it is progressing, having impact and achieving improved outcomes for the young person.

The PA will offer information, advice and support to the young person regarding other services, support networks and employment opportunities such as through Job Centre Plus, Connexions, college and the Department for Work and Pensions, as necessary and appropriate, and accompany the young person to appointments if they request this support.

The PA will support young people to complete their chosen programme of education or training including work experience, apprenticeships and/or higher education. The Virtual School remain involved post 16 to support access to education and training. Beyond education, the PA will signpost the young person to relevant organisations such as Connexions to guide them with careers advice and accompany them if necessary to help them find suitable employment.

The PA will offer help and support with Health appointments and in obtaining their Health Passport which is provided by the Lead Nurse for children in care. If necessary, the PA will support and guide the young person towards mental health services.

The Buckinghamshire Housing Protocol will be explained to the young person at the earliest stage and the PA will support the young person to find suitable accommodation bearing in mind that care leavers are young and often vulnerable in the community.

The PA will assist the young person to access their 'prime documents' if they do not have them, e.g., passport, birth certificate, NI number and application for registration card (ARC) in the case of unaccompanied asylum seekers.

The PA will also make attempts to help and support the young person to maintain or improve family relationships, if requested. This usually requires considerable emotional support to address difficult issues from the young person's childhood such as feelings of abandonment, loss and separation which sometimes remain unresolved.

7.0 Buckinghamshire's Leaving Care Profile

As of February 2018 the Buckinghamshire profile recorded 479 children in care and 207 Care Leavers. There are 10.6 full-time equivalent PAs. Each PA holds an average caseload of 20 over 18 year olds. They are also the named PA for approximately 11, 16-18 year olds and work alongside the child's allocated social worker. Some care leavers live away from Buckinghamshire and this can impact on the PA's time and incurs a cost for travel.

At present the age range of care leavers is as follows:

Age	Number
18	51
19	65
20	64
21	22
22	0
23	1
24	3
25	1

8.0 Key issues

1. At present care leavers receive support up to age 21, unless they remain in Education, and can receive a service until the age of 25.
2. New legislation 'Keep on Caring' (July 2016) outlines proposals to provide Leaving Care Services to all 18-25 year olds, whether or not they are in education. This will impact on the capacity within Buckinghamshire's Aftercare Service. At present there are 202, 18-21 year olds and only 5 over age 21. If all 202 young people are required to receive an Aftercare Service until the age of 25, the current staffing establishment will not be sufficient to provide the required level of service.
3. Work is underway with Adult's Services to improve transitions from Children's Services to Adult's Services.

9.0 Resource implications

Additional staff resources within the Aftercare Service and the Transitions Team in Adult's Services may be required to provide sufficient capacity to support the number of care leavers needing to make a successful transition to young adulthood and independence, and where appropriate onto Adult Services.

10.0 Next steps



1. An Aftercare and Transitions Strategy is required for delivering an integrated service approach between Children's Social Care, Education, Health and Adult Services for young people aged 16 to 25 years.
2. A mapping exercise is required to ascertain the staffing requirements in the Aftercare and Transitions Teams to meet the legislative requirements regarding care leavers.
3. A financial modelling exercise is required following the development of the strategy and the mapping exercise to ascertain affordability. This will require the Head of Care Management for Children's Services, the Service Manager for Adult Transitions Team and relevant Finance Officers to scope the requirements and cost implications.
4. The target date for actions is 27th April 2018.