

METROPOLITAN BOROUGH OF WIRRAL

CABINET (SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES) : 14TH MARCH 2002

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES

CHILDREN LEAVING CARE

Executive Summary

This report highlights the implications of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 for members. Information is provided in respect of progress with implementation. Agreement is sought in respect of the Children Leaving Care Policy for the Support of Young People Leaving Care.

1 Background

- 1.1 The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 came in to force on the 1st October 2000. It followed on from the Government's Safeguards Review and the Consultation Document - Me, Survive, Out There?
- 1.2 The Act changed the responsibilities and duties of Local Authorities towards young people post 16 years in and leaving care. The main changes are:
 - Young people who are, or have been looked after for 13 weeks and who are looked after on their 16th birthday, or after, require a Needs Assessment and Pathway Plan that details how they will be supported and enabled to move to independence.
 - Involvement with young people under the Act will continue to the age of 21 years or 24 years if the young person is in further education.
 - All young people will have a nominated Personal Adviser to assist them and monitor and ensure delivery of their Pathway Plan.
 - Young People will become eligible under this Act at the age of 16 years although they may remain in their care placement.
 - Young People aged 16 and 17 years who leave their care placements and who qualify under the Act will have their financial support provided by the Local Authority through the Social Services Department.
 - Young People aged 18 - 21 (24 if in further education) have access to appropriate support to ensure their plans are realised.
 - The Act requires other Local Authority Department and the Health Authority to assist the Social Services Department in providing support and resources to ensure positive outcomes for the Care Leavers.

- A ring fenced budget is now allocated to Social Services Department comprising elements of SSA, Quality Protect Special Grant and money transferred from the Department of Work and Pensions.

2 Implementation

2.1 Within Quality Protects MAP3 specific grant funding was used to forward plan for the Act: and the following posts were created.

- Leaving Care Co-ordinator
- Leaving Care Administrator
- 0.5 Leaving Care Administration post.
- 0.5 Benefit Advisor
- Mental Health Co-ordinator for 16+

The posts were developed to increase the capacity of the existing team to be better able to meet the needs of Care Leavers and to develop the systems and inter agency working that the Act requires. A post with Housing to develop care leavers accommodation and with Education to support young people aged 16+ who remain in school or further education are under discussion and will be reported to Cabinet separately.

2.2 Financial Guidelines have been developed. These have been agreed by the Department Accountant and the Finance Management Accountant. Copies are available on request and have guided work with, and payments to, Care Leavers. The financial guidelines will be kept under review in the light of National and Regional discussions about the standardisation of payments across Local Authorities. They will be updated in line with changes to the benchmark figure, which is the J.S.A. for 18-year-old paid by D.W.P. The Department will also be involving Care Leavers in a consultation process in respect of the financial guidelines. A draft policy statement is attached for consideration and agreement.

2.3. A multi agency steering group has been established to co-ordinate Agencies/Departments' involvement and action required to improve the outcome for Care Leavers.

2.4. A multi agency service is being developed. Youth Service, Connexions, Health are involved in the first phase of broadening the skill base of the service.

2.5 Agreements with Voluntary Agencies and private providers in relation to the accommodation and support needs of care leavers have been reviewed. An agreement with Forum Housing for bedspaces has been altered to provide 100 hours direct support to Care Leavers in whichever accommodation they are living. The demand for this service will be kept under review and the service put out to tender from April 2003. The Grant funding to M.A.P has been reviewed and a further development of emergency "stopover" accommodation for Care Leavers is being developed with this organisation. A contract has been placed with Priory Nook, the only registered private landlord for this age group, for the block purchase of the six beds provided by this establishment.

- 2.6 In partnership with Forum Housing a Care Leavers Centre has been opened and is providing support to a growing number of young people who are making use of the Centre.
- 2.7 Wirral is a member of a National Benchmarking Group to enable us to contribute to the development of National Standards and learn from other authorities.
- 2.8 Multi agency training in respect of the Act has been organised using First Key, a National Voluntary organisation for Care Leavers. This Organisation is also providing advice about implementation to the Steering Group.

3 Financial and Staffing Implications

- 3.1 For the financial year 02/03 the ringfenced budget for Young People living in and leaving care 16 plus is £2,169,000.
- 3.2 Allocation has been made from within this grant to meet the costs of payment to Care Leavers, their rent and support costs.
- 3.3. Allocation has also been made for existing staffing costs and new posts required to meet the requirements of the Act. These posts are detailed in Quality Protects MAP4. They provide for a growth in Personal Advisors of 2.5 posts, a designated worker to ensure effective co-ordination of services for children with disabilities who are leaving care and two reviewing posts to meet the new requirements, plus 1 admin assistant.

4. Equal Opportunities Implications

The aim of the Act is to ensure that young people in public care have access to the same life chances and support as other young people.

5. Human Rights Implications

The Act is aimed at ensuring young people in and leaving care are supported to ensure that they can become fully participating members of society and do not experience discrimination as a consequence of having been in Public Care.

6. Local Agenda 21 Implications

The Act aims to assist young people leaving care to become active, contributing members of their community and society.

7 Community Safety Implications

Better co-ordinated services to this group of young people would seek to reduce antisocial and criminal behaviour. The Act was aimed at improving services and support to reduce the over representation of Care Leavers in the prison population.

8 Joint Working Implications

The basis of the Act is that this group of young people require better co-ordinated and easier access to a range of Local Authority and other services. The aim is to develop a multi Agency Care Leavers Service with fully integrated working and a “one stop shop” for Care Leavers.

9 Planning Implications

None directly arising from this report.

10 Local Member Support Implications

Care leavers originate from and may choose to live in all the Authorities wards.

11 Background Papers

ME, SURVIVE, OUT THERE?
CHILDREN (LEAVING CARE) ACT 2000 & REGULATIONS & GUIDANCE.

12 Recommendations

12.1 That the contents of this report be noted.

12.2 That the Policy Statement be approved.

KEVIN MILLER
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Date 7/3/02