

**Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Tuesday, 14 November 2017**

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| REPORT TITLE: | Reality Check visit to the Leaving Care Service - Feedback |
| REPORT OF: | The Chair of the Committee – Councillor Tom Usher |

REPORT SUMMARY

Committee members have previously agreed the principle of undertaking a series of Reality Check visits by small groups of members to enable those members to engage directly with frontline staff. This report provides feedback from a visit to the Leaving Care Service on Wednesday 18th October 2017

RECOMMENDATION/S

It is recommended that Committee:

- 1) Notes the report.
- 2) Considers any points to be learned prior to the next of the Reality Check visits.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

The reality visit and subsequent recommendations will enable Committee members to complete part of the Committee's work programme.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Not Applicable

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 Principles of Reality Check visits

Key to the success of scrutiny is the ability of members to check evidence from a variety of sources. While members routinely receive reports from senior management and have access to performance monitoring reports, it is suggested that greater access to frontline staff and service users would enable scrutiny members to triangulate evidence with other sources and would give members greater confidence in the outcomes of their scrutiny work. It was, therefore, agreed at the meeting of the Children and Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee held in June to establish a programme of Reality Check Visits through which scrutiny members could engage independently and directly with frontline staff.

Key operating principles for the visits include:

- A programme of visits will be scheduled and will form part of the Committee's work programme. A visit will normally take place approximately every eight weeks. Visits will be set or amended taking into account the programme of externally set scrutiny by Ofsted and the Department of Education.
- There will be no direct relationship between each visit. Therefore, Members may volunteer to participate in any particular visit.
- Prior to each visit, a short briefing note will be prepared to inform members of the function of the service area, background information and any issues directly relevant to the Ofsted report.
- Each visit will comprise a maximum of six members supported by a scrutiny officer. A visit will usually take a maximum of 2 hours.
- The visits will give Members the opportunity to talk directly to staff so they can understand their perspective of the service. Members will be able to ask questions directly, for example, on caseloads, support offered to staff, auditing of cases and the outcomes for children and families.
- The findings from each visit will be reported to the next meeting of the Children and Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

3.2 Visit to the Leaving Care Service 18th October 2017

The visit to the Leaving Care Service in Rock Ferry took place on Wednesday 18th October 2017. Cllrs Tom Usher (Chair), Alan Brighthouse, Wendy Clements, and Chris Meaden took part in the visit, which was hosted by Carole Nixon (Head of the Service). Carole was accompanied by a management team of Jeff Hay, Peter Rogan and Chris Pentecost. Following a presentation relating to the operation of the service, there was an open question and answer session with the Personal Advisor team and managers. Members then spoke to a number Personal Advisors individually.

3.3 Background to the Leaving Care Service

Wirral Council are committed to act as a 'good parent' to young people leaving care for whom it has a corporate parenting responsibility. This means that young people leaving care will receive support whilst they make their transition to adulthood. The support will include assistance with securing suitable accommodation, securing employment, education or training, and personal support e.g. in relation to family relationships, and emotional health and well-being. Support to care leavers is delivered by a team of 16 Full time equivalent Personal Advisors.

Wirral Council's policies are applied in accordance with the definitions in the Children Act 1989 for Eligible, Relevant, Former Relevant and Qualifying Young People. This also includes in certain circumstances young people who are subject to Special Guardianship Orders who were looked after immediately before the order.

The Leaving Care Service in Wirral has traditionally been focused on providing advice, guidance and support to young people in the above categories up to the age 21, or up to the age of 25 if still in full-time education. Legislative changes were introduced earlier this year that require continued involvement for care leavers up to the age of 25. The fine detail and full implications of these changes is yet to be determined and is subject to Department for Education consultation during November.

Services provided are based on identified needs as determined by the Pathway Plan Part 1 (Assessment), and then set out in the Pathway Plan Part 2 (The Plan) that gives a detailed reflection of how their social, educational, accommodation, and other identified needs will be met. Pathway Plans are co-ordinated by the child's social worker prior to leaving care and then by the Personal Advisors post 18. It is expected that the care leavers themselves make a significant contribution to the Pathway plan and that the plan itself reflects their wishes, feelings and aspirations

All preparation for leaving care and provision of after care services will take account of the young person's gender, religion, racial origin, cultural and linguistic background, sexual orientation and any needs arising from them having a disability.

Young people who are also parents have services offered to them as care leavers in their own right, as well as any support or interventions related to their children which would be delivered by district teams.

Young people leaving care who receive a service from the Children with Disabilities Team will continue to receive a service from this team in conjunction with the Pathway Team. This process is managed by the Transition Team Manager based in the Children with Disabilities Team.

The oversight and management of the Leaving Care Service is the responsibility of the Head of Service and Service Manager for Children in Care and Leaving Care. Senior managers provide oversight and input during monthly meetings with Children in Care Team Managers and Advanced Practitioners who provide the direct line management for the Leaving Care Service.

3.4 Findings from the Members' visit to the Leaving Care Service

Key conclusions reached by the Members were:

3.4.1 Positives

- Members were impressed by the energy, dedication and passion of the team. This was evident during the open discussion and from individual conversations with managers and staff. The atmosphere in the team appeared to be very positive.
- Members were reassured that the service has made good progress towards achieving the recommendations outlined by Ofsted during their inspection in July 2016, and following the last monitoring visit in August 2017.
- Managers were realistic about the progress made, and clear about the future challenges and further improvements required to attain best practice within the service.
- Personal Advisors provide an agile and flexible service to support young people and, following recent recruitment, Personal Advisor workloads now compare well against other local authorities.
- Appropriate supervision and support is provided by service managers and the introduction of the traffic light 'RAG' rating of cases is an example of improved management oversight and risk monitoring.
- Members welcomed the introduction of the 'What Makes a Good Personal Advisor' document created using care leavers feedback and the team's aspiration to achieve all listed characteristics.
- The resilience and tenacity of the Personal Advisors' approach to keeping 'in touch' with care leavers was evident. All contacts with care leavers are captured on the Liquid Logic system.
- The Christmas Dinner Project, to provide a meal, gifts and somewhere to meet for care leavers who may otherwise be alone at Christmas, was particularly welcomed by members. It was acknowledged that this project will be supported by the team and others on an entirely voluntary basis and charitable donations, local business and community support were being sought to help fund this project. Members encourage councillors

and officers across the Council to support and raise awareness of this project.

3.4.2 Challenges

- Further progress is required on individualising and improving the quality of Pathway Plans, to ensure that the young person's voice and wishes are reflected. It is hoped that the introduction of new digital agile (tablet) technology and way of working will assist with this in future. Further staff training and benchmarking could be explored regarding reflecting the care leavers' identity in Pathway Plans and ensuring greater care leaver engagement with and ownership of the Plans. Members were reassured that this is an area identified by the team as a priority.
- The Leaving Care Team is currently based in two different locations. Members noted staff comments on the advantage of being in one location, as the team has a mixture of skills and can share information and expertise.
- There is some uncertainty regarding young people in residential care and the transition arrangements to adult services following the integration of services with the NHS.
- The daily drop-in hub was viewed by staff as an important resource for care leavers. It is located in the 'Response' service building (which is an accessible wider service that focusses on the needs of vulnerable young people). This was opened following Care Leavers Council feedback regarding the importance of having a dedicated space for care leavers to drop-in and access support and advice, in addition to resources associated with other services such as the drug and alcohol service. This is currently a temporary facility operating between 1 and 4pm on weekdays. The team hope that premises can be obtained for the establishment of a permanent hub with extended opening times to provide a more responsive service to care leavers. It would create a confidential space to meet with Personal Advisors and provide facilities for support and skills training, such as cleaning and cooking skills. There is evidence of outstanding rated local authorities having these facilities and the team feel that this would enhance the service and support offer to the borough's care leavers.
- There is uncertainty around increased pressure on the service in future in relation to the changes in legislation requiring a service for all care leavers aged up to 25, should they request it. Whilst the impact of these changes should be monitored closely over the coming months, members are impressed with pro-active approach taken by the team so far.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS

There are no resource implications arising directly from this report.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

Not Applicable

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

Not Applicable

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

This report is for information to members and there are no direct equality implications.

REPORT AUTHOR: **Patrick Torpey**
Scrutiny Officer
0151 691 8381
email: patricktorpey@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES: None

REFERENCE MATERIAL

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

| Council Meeting | Date |
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