

## **Review of the Local Offer for Care Leavers**

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The life chances of children in and leaving care are significantly worse than for those who have not grown up in the care. Recent legislative and policy developments have prioritised services for children in and leaving care. The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Sub Committee will review the current offer the council provides to children leaving care and new, proposed changes.

The **Children and Social Work Bill** seeks to combine a commitment to protect the most vulnerable in society with the "ambition to ensure that disadvantaged children have the brightest possible future". The Bill has currently been heard in the House of Lords and will be debated in the House of Commons in October. A subsequent strategy titled **Keep on Caring Supporting Young People from Care to Independence** published in July 2016 sets out a plan for the delivery of the proposed changes to what is described as a 'step change' in services designed for children in and leaving care.

At the same time the **House of Commons Education Committee** published its inquiry into the *Mental health and well-being of looked-after children 2015/16*.

The Children and Social Work Bill presents an opportunity to enhance the support available for care leavers through a 'local offer' and must recognise the need for all care leavers to be supported to manage their finances, find safe and stable accommodation and not find themselves falling into debt.

### **Care Leaver Local Offer**

While the new proposed legislation seeks to improve services for children in care across the board, the Education and Children's Services Committee will focus on the experience of children and young people leaving the care system. The Keep on Caring Strategy sees the local help and support that care leavers receive from their local authority as being critical to whether care leavers make the transition from care to independence successfully.

The proposed 'Care Leavers' Covenant' provides an opportunity to set out clear obligations and responsibilities to local authorities to ensure they continue to play a parental role up until the age of 25.

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The committee is also interested in the way in which our services will respond to proposals in new legislation and guidance on:

- The implementation of the Care Leaver Covenant (to be launched in October 2016)
- The new Care Leaver Offer in particular how the existing and possibly amended offer will be communicated to children and young people in and leaving care.
- The extension of support from a Personal Adviser to all care leavers to age 25, how this will be implemented and how it will be communicated to those who have already left our services but will now be eligible for a 'retrospective' personal adviser' service provision.

## **The House of Commons Education Committee Mental health and well-being of looked-after children 2015/16**

The mental health of looked after children is significantly poorer than that of their peers, with almost half of the children and young people in care meeting the criteria for a psychiatric disorder. The 2014 report into CAMHS is cited for revealing the crisis in the commissioning and provision of CAMHS.

The Government will invest £1.4 billion in children and young people's mental health services over the course of this parliament. Yet children in care and care leavers are more likely to experience poor health, education and social outcomes. Young people leaving care are five times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers, and looked-after children and care leavers are between four and five times more likely to self-harm in adulthood.

They are more likely to enter the criminal justice system. 23% of adult prisoners have been in care and 40% of prisoners under 21. A comparative case study shows how one child's unstable and unsupported experience of care costs £22,415 more per year (including health, social care and criminal justice costs) than another child's stable and well supported care journey. Seen in this context, it would make more sense to invest in good mental health services earlier on, to prevent inflated costs for those children who have a poor experience of care and services.

## **Southwark services for children in and leaving care**

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Sub Committee are interested in understanding what the current offer to care leavers is in Southwark, and the steps the council can take in the implementation of the new covenant.

The committee wish to make sure that all care leavers are able to access a range of services to meet their needs including: financial support; access to education, training and employment; personal advisers and effective pathway planning; appropriate housing, including supported accommodation; and mental health and counselling services. Given the well documented evidence that young people who have been in care are at particular risk of mental

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health problems, it is important to ensure that care leavers are able to access to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) during their transition out of care and into independence, if needed. It is particularly timely to focus on this given the joint mental health strategy is in preparation.

The committee will examine the accommodation choices available for care leavers. In 2015, there were nationally 4,460 care leavers aged 19-21 living in supported accommodation, supported lodgings or foyers. Research from The Children's Society found these kinds of accommodation can often present high levels of risk for young people exposing them to alcohol and drugs and placing them under significant financial strain, and at risk of being evicted from their accommodation due to rent arrears. For example 82% of accommodation providers surveyed estimated that three quarters of the 16 and 17 year olds they cared for were in receipt of state benefits and in rent arrears. Southwark's accommodation offer for Care Leavers is currently under review, so this is also an opportune time to look at this issue in more depth.

Presently Care Leavers access advice from Personal Assistances and voluntary providers. The review will look at the quality and consistency of this offer, to ensure that all Care Leavers are getting appropriate support to help them transition to adulthood successfully.

Care Leavers are not a homogenised group, and there is a great deal of diversity in young people needs, abilities and disabilities. Some young people Leaving Care will be off to university, while others will be entering adult social services, and some may have a range of issues and impairments, such as autism or mental health needs. The review will need to consider the diversity of the Local Offer for Care Leavers.

Care leavers can now be supported up to their 25th birthday in line with the new proposals to extend the provision of a personal adviser to 25. Care leavers should also be better supported through improved financial education to manage their finances and have improved knowledge of household bills to support them in their transition to adulthood.

Whether the select committee results or the Children and Social Work Bill can realise improve life chances for children in care is yet to be seen. Nevertheless the spotlight on vulnerable children in care provides an opportunity for all local authorities, including Southwark, to be even more positive in its work with children leaving care.

## Review of local offer for Care Leavers plan

Activity	Method
Presentations and reports from all council and health service heads concerned with care leavers	Presentations and reports from all service heads concerned with care leavers, including leads for the , social work Care Leavers team, Children's Rights team, Care Leavers Accommodation, the Local Economy Team, Organisation Development and the apprenticeship scheme, and CareLink , delivered by SLaM / CAMHS
Visits to care leavers services – accommodation	Committee members visit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hostel provision – e.g. Springfield Lodge</li> <li>• Future Foundations semi independence provision</li> <li>• SABs specialist accommodation for mental health</li> </ul>
Visits to care leavers services - Employment and training providers	SEEDS Others providers recommended by the Local Economy team
Visits to care leavers mental health services	CareLink Faces in Focus
Focus group with children about to leave	
Focus group with Care Leavers on personal assistance and survey monkey	
Focus groups with local voluntary sector services	
Roundtable with all interested parties – including CCG , NHS and Local Authority practitioners, managers, commissioners	