



Review of the Local Offer for Care Leavers

Report of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-
committee

April 2017

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1 Introduction

1.1 The scrutiny subcommittee for education and children's services has now considered Southwark's local offer for care leavers. This is timely given that national government is looking closely at the experiences of care leavers, through its inquiry into foster care and its proposed legislative changes in the Children and Social Work Bill.

1.2 Southwark supports high numbers of children in care:

- 500 Looked After Children
- 330 children on Child Protection Plans
- 350 Care Leavers

Background

1.3 While growing up in care is not a barrier to a successful life, and many care leavers go on to achieve good outcomes, the life chances of the majority of children in care and care leavers are significantly worse than for those who have not grown up in care. Recent legislative and policy developments have prioritised services for children in and leaving care.

Legislation

1.4 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 been heard in the House of Lords and will be debated in the House of Commons in October. A subsequent strategy entitled **Keep on Caring - Supporting Young People from Care to Independence**, published in July 2016, sets out a plan for the delivery of a 'step change' in services for children in and leaving care.

- 1.5 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 following report is the result of a year-long scrutiny review conducted into services for care leavers in Southwark.

2 The local offer

- 2.1 The local offer for care leavers is a combination of statutory entitlements i.e. what the law says must be given, and what Southwark and its partners can give, over and above its local duty. The Children and Social Work Bill wants local authorities to consult on and publish details of their local offer to care leavers, setting out areas such as education, health, employment and accommodation.
- 2.2 The scrutiny committee heard evidence on Southwark care services' statutory duties.

Personal Advisers

- 2.3 Currently all local authorities must appoint a personal adviser for care leavers until they are 21, or until they are 25 if they are in education or training.
- Once the Children and Social Work Bill is legislated, the right to a personal adviser will be extended to the age of 25.
- 2.4 In Southwark, personal advisers' case loads have been reduced to 20-25. They are located together in four practice groups. The service as it stands

cannot guarantee consistency of personal adviser for care leavers and is often reliant on agency staff.

2 Accommodation

- 2.3 In Southwark, following assessment, care leavers are offered a priority housing nomination and supported accommodation to continue preparation for independence. Support workers are employed to assist the young person in her/his transition and care leavers are entitled to £2,000 when gaining permanent tenancy.
- 2.4 The committee received evidence from the Southwark Care Leavers Accommodation and 16-Plus Support Project, but noted that most accommodation for care leavers is out of borough and out of London. Based on February performance data, 368 of our looked after children population were placed out of borough leaving 142 placed in borough.
- 2.5 The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced Staying Put to allow young people to stay with their foster families until the age of 21. However, for children who do not have that option - like those children in residential care or adolescents coming into the care system late - housing is an important and pressing issue.
- 2.6 In the course of this review we visited specialised accommodation for care leavers, such as Springfield Lodge accommodation for young homeless people including care leavers. The in-London support for care leavers included supported, semi-independent and independent placements to get the young people ready for independent living. This is an approach that has worked well for children leaving care in Southwark.
- 2.7 But such placements are in short supply. While Government may have committed to piloting 'Staying Close' arrangements for young people leaving

residential care, which would provide some form of suitable accommodation for young people in this category, this does not amount to a legal entitlement, so it is not equivalent to Staying Put. This is pertinent for Southwark care leavers.

Care leavers feedback

- 2.8 When we spoke to a focus group of 10 care leavers they told us that accommodation is a key issue, and nine said their accommodation options were limited and inadequate. One of the young people must commute to and from Southport to attend his London college course.
- 2.9 One young person has been placed in Birmingham but prefers to stay in overcrowded conditions at a friend's house in Croydon so that she can be near friends and family. One young man has been in 'semi independent' accommodation for five years. Although he likes where he is staying he has no idea or plan when he will move to his own permanent accommodation. For those that are 'staying put' with their respective foster carers, they are worried that they will end up having to leave London.
- 2.10 One young British Black young woman had been placed in Devon. She couldn't relate to anyone and came back to London.
- 2.11 When we spoke to the young care leavers' focus group, it was quite clear that they understood the pressures on the London housing market. They were not being unreasonable about the type of housing that could be available to them. The scrutiny committee considered alternative accommodation models that may be helpful to commission in Southwark for care leavers.

3 Examples of successful care leavers' accommodation commissioning

- 3.1 One example to consider is the Barnardo's Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework. This was written in 2015 by Barnardo's in partnership with St Basils (a Midlands youth homeless charity). It is a tool to help local authorities commission a wide range of accommodation and support for care leavers. The work was originally funded by DCLG to help local authorities prevent young people falling into homelessness.
- 3.2 The Framework is based on the Positive Youth Accommodation Pathway that St Basils produced five years ago. The DCLG funded it to better support young people at risk of homelessness. The DfE has provided money to roll this programme out for care leavers.
- 3.3 Young people leaving care need somewhere safe and suitable to live to help them make a positive transition into adulthood. Good housing underpins success in other areas of life. This framework draws together expertise from local authorities, voluntary sector organisations and young people across England on how to provide appropriate accommodation for care leavers.

Catch 22 and Commonweal Peer Landlords

- 3.4 The peer landlord scheme provides an innovative and supportive approach to housing for young people. The houses are jointly occupied by three or four young people. One is assigned the role of 'peer landlord'. The peer landlord has the responsibility of providing support to other tenants as well as overseeing the smooth functioning of the house on a day to day basis.
- 3.5 The first peer landlord who is 23 now sees himself as a live in property manager. He explained that the security and safety of the house was really important to him given his past experience in 2012 when he was living with friends in Lewisham, was burgled, and was forced out of his bedroom window

by a man holding a gun. He fell 40 feet. He likes being a peer landlord as he feels he has other people to look out for, not just himself.

- 3.6 Many young care leavers like the set up as they feel like they are living independently with a combination of house mates that feels like a family. These examples can serve as a model for the commissioning of local accommodation for care leavers.

3 Education and Employment

- 3.1 The government's [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. One of the key outcomes of the strategy is to improve access to education, employment and training.
- 3.2 The Councils' Local Economy youth employment programmes are accessible to care leavers, though *they do not track outcomes for care leavers* specifically as part of their contract monitoring with providers.
- 3.3 This review notes the role of the Corporate Parenting Committee in monitoring education outcomes for children in care. The review was interested in the post 16 experience of children in care and care leavers.
- 3.4 As part of the review into Southwark's local offer to care leavers, the committee organised a visit to two significant services: St Giles Trust and Inspire. Both are examples of great work with young people to realise their educational and employment aspirations.

St Giles

- 3.5 The project confirmed that they work with care leavers, and other young people who need support, including young people with caring responsibilities. Some young people can only work for shorter periods due to restrictions on time.

The project addresses career progression, and can often include college and attending short courses. Smaller providers are able to build confidence with young people through developing relationships. Part of the project's work is employment engagement with actual and potential employers.

Inspire

- 3.6 Inspire delivers the *InSpired to Work* programme as part of *Southwark Works*. This programme supports young adults of 18-24 into employment by supporting them through training, job searching & creation, advocacy and bursaries. This programme includes the Employee Mentor programme, which matches a young person's aspirations with a mentor and placement in an organisation. An employer mentor guides the young person's work placement and supports their future career development.

- 3.7 The project is open to all young people who are local, not just Care Leavers. InSpire have been working with a specialised service that works with care leavers so they have received more referrals. More recently Inspire have been working with an officer who is the employment lead for Southwark on a council initiative recently convened to focus on 40 young people, in conjunction with other agencies. Relevant people and organisation all came together to create action plans for the young people and develop a range of services. The young people were not there for time efficiency reasons; however the young peoples' social workers & PAs were present. InSpire found this approach really valuable, particularly being able to hear from the range of professional expertise and understand the breadth of opportunities.

Each young person was assigned support and an action plan. The lead council officer is holding this process. Inspire received nine referrals.

- 3.8 Young people are supported to attend workshops about employment, and how to manage their money. Each young person has a dedicated case worker. Young people are matched with a placement and mentor from the industry they want to enter e.g. Accountancy. The initiative also holds unique events, such as event management.

Unresolved issues are wide ranging and challenging in the current financial climate. But better working arrangements between different departments and institutions could bring about improvements.

- There are problems in communication between housing and social care for the young people that the voluntary sector have to pick up.
- Apprenticeships are low pay jobs; the high living costs locally mean young people require extra support to be able to access an apprenticeship. This means that apprenticeships are unaffordable unless there is either family support, or additional social support.
- Care leavers can get support but those of them on the fringe might have problems – for example where they have accessed care services later.
- Young people who fall through the gaps are a concern.
- London living wage is needed for young people. This would make Apprenticeships fully accessible to a range of young people.
- There is an absence of a viable further education offer in Southwark which will have an impact on all young people planning to access higher education (OSC are considering this).
- University tuition fees present obstacles for care leavers to see higher education as a viable issue.

4 Mental Health

- 4.1 The state of mental health services for looked after children has been subjected to national scrutiny. The House of Commons Education Committee report *Mental health and well-being of looked-after children 2015/16* provoked a national outcry for putting the media spotlight on the inaccessibility of CAHMS to children in care and care leavers.
- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 The Government is investing £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.
- 4.4 National statistics show that children leaving care are 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. It is widely accepted that seen in context, it makes 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.
- 4.5 The Education and Children's Scrutiny committee looked at the issue of looked after children and care leavers mental health in Southwark.

The issues are as follows:

- 4.6 It is widely accepted that Looked After Children (LAC) are too often based out of Southwark. This is more challenging for the council in its corporate parenting role. The committee asked how young people's health needs are addressed and officers responded that there is an out of borough nurse and we also work with GP receptionists to ensure registration.
- 4.7 The transition for young people into local borough CAMHS services remains patchy. With fostering done locally the transition is easier. For the cohort that often moves further out it is harder. There is a danger that children with self-harm issues, for example, are not accessing services. Elizabeth Murphy said she does extensive work with young people moved out of borough to advocate for young people to receive services from the borough that the young people are located in.
- 4.8 Local service providers can advocate but cannot force local CAMHS to provide services. However sometimes that is not adequate and the local CAMHS will not step in or it will be too late by the time the young person is accepted. In these circumstances, social care will privately commission services if young people are not able to access local services.
- 4.9 Young people with greater needs are often the people the council struggle to provide services for closest to home.
- 4.10 There is an issue of children on the edge of care. Commissioned services are not where we want them to be. Our staying put (with foster carers) is working well. Yet the availability of public housing has reduced drastically for all people.

- 4.11 So, if a person has been based in Kent for 10 years, it makes sense for them to live there. The developing post-16 accommodation strategy highlighted above acknowledges that young people are now sometimes placed outside of borough.
- 4.12 Southwark has good educational outcomes for its looked after children. But the issue of accommodation and the onset of mental health issues at the often 'tricky' adolescent stage of life can be a barrier for care leavers to realise their education or employment aspirations.
- 4.13 CareLink will accept all children for an assessment if they receive a referral where someone is raising a concern about a mental health issue.
- 4.14 Evidence shows that care leavers have poorer outcomes for physical & mental health, and are vulnerable to issues of Child Sexual Exploitation. The safeguarding board identifies risks to mitigate. Care leavers have been 'repositioned' within safeguarding as they have already reached that threshold.
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- 4.15 The review looked at assessments for care leavers and found that the joint strategic needs assessment doesn't always meet needs.
- 4.16 Officers report risky behaviour indicators that demonstrate that responses are needed and this will be picked up in the Mental Health Strategy, due for completion in March.
- 4.17 Faced with this evidence it makes sense that all care leavers should receive the offer of a mental health assessment by a mental health professional so that they can be given the mental health and well-being support that is right for them.

Issues for consideration

- 4.18 There could be a better link between demand for local care leaving services and local commissioning.
- 4.19 As above a commissioning strategy for care leaver's accommodation locally would mean that care leavers with poor mental health could access local services.
- 4.20 The investment of £1.4 billion nationally in CAMHS announced by the Government is extremely welcome, but it is crucial that it is used locally to provide the best possible outcomes for children and young people, and particularly for vulnerable groups such as children in care.
- 4.21 There needs to be greater joint working and commissioning of services between early help and intervention, mental health assessment and housing. In short a joint commissioning strategy for care leavers in Southwark.

5 What Southwark care leavers want

5.1 On 05.04.17 we held a focus group with 10 Southwark care leavers at Talfourd Place. They were asked a series of questions on the key aspects of the Local Offer and mental health services. A note of the review can be found in the appendix.

5.2 Each young person was asked what if they would like to see anything change

5.3 The following suggestions were made.

- 1) Reinstate telephones with someone at the other end.
- 2) Reinforce transparency and honesty on the decisions made about individual care leavers..
- 3) Personal advisers, social workers and all other staff are asked to be professional when it comes to time keeping and always be on time.
- 4) Young people requested that managers demonstrate better leadership of social workers and personal advisers.
- 5) Move on accommodation should be made available in London – this doesn't have to be a house or flat – but could be shared options.
- 6) Local emergency and temporary accommodation was required. One young person had to travel all the way to her job in Croydon because she had been moved to emergency accommodation in Waltham Forest
- 7) More services; workshops on support on independent living were requested.
- 8) A commissioning strategy for accommodation in multi cultural areas – as noted above one young British Black woman complained about placements in Devon. Others felt that placements in Scotland and the Isle of Wight are just too far away.
- 9) Young people emphasised the importance of knowing their rights, and having good information about services. Specialised and generic services we visited were not always making use of the full range of services for Care Leavers.

6 Conclusion

The scrutiny review has revealed good practice in Southwark for care leavers. The areas which need improving are already known and understood by the children's workforce. The Council and its partners are working under considerable financial pressure which makes it doubly important that our care leavers service is fit for purpose. At the time of writing the DfE announced that the Council has been successful in its joint innovation bid with Catch 22 to transform our services for care leavers. This is welcome news which will enable greater positive outcomes for young people leaving care.

In addition, the opportunities for care leavers outlined in the Children and Social Work Bill along with further investment in CAHMS must be seized upon by the leaders of the Southwark children's workforce to better improve the life chances of children in care and leaving care.

The committee wishes to make sure that all care leavers can 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 risk of mental health problems, it is important that no young person in or leaving our care requiring emotional support falls through the safety net. It is vital 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.

7 Recommendations

The Local Offer

- The Council should begin its consultation on its implementation of the Care Leaver Covenant with all the relevant partners in the children's workforce, local economy and local businesses and health
- A new Care Leaver Offer as amended in line with the new legislation and attached recommendations must be communicated to children and young people in care and leaving care.
- The Local Offer for Care Leavers should be published so that both young people and agencies know their rights, entitlements and the range of support service available to meet their needs, and include both specialised and generic services that they are likely to make use of. This should include:
housing entitlements; accommodation & housing support services; higher education grants; employment, training, education support services; apprenticeships programmes; counselling, mental health and emotional support; personal advisers; advocacy & mentoring; accesses to practical and relational courses to prepare young people for independent living.

Personal Advisers

- The extension of support from a Personal Adviser to all care leavers to age 25 must be communicated to those who have already left our services but will now be eligible for a 'retrospective personal adviser' service provision.
- A capability review of personal advisers could be made, so that the council and its partners can meet the expectations of the care leavers requiring services
- A plan is required to get in touch with care leavers retrospectively on the extended support arrangements.

Housing

- A joint commissioning strategy for care leavers must be drafted about housing and children's services.
- The commissioning strategy should consider examples of innovative accommodation commissioning featured in this report, with a view to commissioning accommodation for care leavers in Southwark.
- The Corporate Parenting Committee should review the commissioning strategy and its implementation

Mental Health

- Mental health assessments to be made available for every child in care and care leaver in Southwark.
- A joint commissioning strategy for care leavers services is urgently needed to find innovative solutions to find local placements for care leavers close to local mental health services.

Employment, education and training

- A programme of training for care leavers must be refreshed, published and widely advertised
- All care leavers must be supported to manage their finances, find safe and stable accommodation and not find themselves falling into debt.
- In the absence of a good further education offer Southwark should look at ways to increase the number of care leavers attending university. This should include lobbying government to waive tuition fees for care leavers or guarantee access to apprenticeships.
- To fully understand the impact of the local offer for care leavers, performance information should be collected on the above points. In addition, the Council should collect statistics on every care leaver accessing services like Inspire and St Giles and collect information on the outcomes in education and employment.