

Item No. 8	Classification: Open	Date: 28 February 2024	Meeting name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Ofsted Focussed Visit for Care Leavers - December 2023	
Ward(s) or groups affected:			
From:		Director of Children Services for Children and Families Directorate	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Corporate Parenting Committee note the contents of the Ofsted letter following the focused visit on 13 and 14 December 2023, in Appendix 1 of the report.
2. That the Corporate Parenting Committee note the evidence of continued improvement in the Care Leaver Service since the last inspection in September 2022.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. Ofsted inspect and regulate services that care for children and young people, as well as services providing education and skills for learners of all ages. Ofsted stated aim is to improve lives by raising standards in education and children's social care.
4. In January 2018 Ofsted implemented the current inspection framework for local authority children's services. This is known as ILACS, Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services.
5. As a local authority with an existing "good" judgement, the council can expect one focused visit or joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) over a three year period between inspections.
6. In September 2022 the council had its last ILACS short inspection and was graded 'good' in all areas (Appendix 2).
7. In January 2023 Ofsted introduced a graded separate judgement the progress of care leavers in the ILACS inspection. The new separate judgement focusses on things that matter to young people who are leaving care including:
 - Opportunities to learn and get into work

- Relationships and ensuring access to recreational and social activities
 - Good health and emotional well-being
 - The ability to feedback and influence on the services they are offered
8. To be judged as outstanding a local authority will need to demonstrate consistent good performance in relation to the areas noted above alongside support to help care leavers transition into adulthood.
 9. Following the ILACS inspection in September 2022 officers led by the Director Children's Service (DCS) have been continuing to drive continuous improvement overseen by Children's Services Continuous Improvement Board with the aspiration of moving from good to outstanding as that quality of service is what is required for our children in care and care leavers.
 10. In December 2023 Ofsted notified the council it would be undertaking a focused visit under their ILACS framework on the theme of care leavers on 13 and 14 December 2023.
 11. Focused visits do not generate a graded judgement but a narrative letter that details findings, outlines strengths, areas for development and impact on outcomes for children and young people that the improvements make.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

What did inspectors look at?

12. Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for care leavers aged 18 to 25, focusing specifically on:
 - Quality and suitability of accommodation;
 - Support into adulthood.
 - Care leavers with specific needs (for example, unaccompanied asylum seekers, young parents or those who have had contact with the criminal justice system).
13. This visit was carried out in line with the ILACS framework. Inspectors looked at a range of evidence, including case discussions with personal advisers (PAs), experienced practitioners and managers. They also looked at local authority performance management and quality assurance information and children's case records.

What did inspectors find?

14. The letter sets out that inspectors found, *“since the last inspection in 2022, services to care leavers have continued to improve, with the needs of most care leavers being met well. Care leavers are well supported into early adulthood, and care leavers with specific or complex needs receive tailored provision. The specialist experienced practitioner roles located within the service provide invaluable support, advice and help to care leavers across a range of needs.”*
15. Ofsted found that, *“Care leavers are involved in service development and their voices are heard.”* The findings were that *“there is a clear local offer, co-produced with care leavers, which identifies their rights and entitlements effectively. There are many opportunities to ensure that the voice of care leavers is heard, understood and acted upon. The corporate parenting committee is active and inclusive for care leavers, being arranged to ensure that care leavers can attend, fully participate in the meeting and be involved in developing services”.*
16. The letter positively notes the critical role that PAs play noting, *“Care leavers receive high-quality support from skilled and committed PAs who know them well and provide practical advice and help when needed. PAs visit care leavers, including those who have children of their own, at a frequency that is consistent with their levels of need and risk, with patterns of contact increasing or decreasing as necessary as care leavers transition into adulthood.”*
17. It was really positive to see the positive acknowledgement of the independence hub where care leavers of over 21 with no maximum age can return to seek help and support. *“An independence hub enables care leavers who are over 21 and have opted not to keep in regular contact to receive ongoing and well-defined assistance. When a care leaver needs more intensive support, they are reallocated to a PA in the care leaver teams.”*
18. The mental health provision for care leavers in Southwark was acknowledged as being met well through access to counselling from The Nest, a mental well-being service, and the support from the council’s Clinical Service which can also support care leavers outside of Southwark.
19. In respect of feedback on education, employment and training the feedback was very positive noting the impact of the dedicated Experienced Practitioner and that care leavers are actively encouraged to pursue higher education. It was further noted our ambition to further improve in this area by our ambition to increasing the number of apprenticeships available through the council and its partners.
20. Securing housing was seen as a strength the support for young people

to access secure and suitable housing with a range of options to include: staying put, supported accommodation and independent accommodation.

21. During the focussed visit inspectors considered how we are supporting disabled care leavers and found that our disabled care leavers had benefited from skilled and knowledgeable practitioners who know them well from the All Age Disability Service (AAD). It was also noted that the practitioners in AAD work well with PAs to ensure that disabled care leavers receive their entitlements when leaving care.
22. In line with our own self-assessment and the findings in September 2022 the inspection found support for unaccompanied young people was good noting, *“Their health, education and cultural needs are understood by their PAs, including the impact of trauma. The provision of effective advocacy and legal advice helps to ensure that these care leavers are able to navigate successfully through the relevant processes to progress their asylum claims.”*

What did inspectors recommend?

23. The focussed visit made two key recommendations for improvement which are:
 - Access to Health Histories
 - Ensuring that accommodation is well maintained
24. In relation to health histories these are provided by our Child Health Service for care leavers and distributed by the Care Leaver Service. In the inspection the group of young people inspectors met did not recall receiving these and some PA's struggled to find these on the case management system. An action plan was submitted to inspectors during the inspection and in February 2024 we will be re-sending all current care leavers a copy of their health history and have a schedule to complete this in the next couple of months.
25. In relation to ensuring accommodation is maintained we are developing function in our Access to Resources Team (ART) to ensure all different types of homes for care leavers are of excellent quality. ART are working to further develop a proactive quality assurance and contract monitoring function in order to ensure that our children and care leavers thrive in high quality homes that are proportionate to their needs whilst providing value for money. A program of quality assurance visits has already commenced and work is taking place with colleagues in the performance and Mosaic teams to make these visible and reportable on Mosaic. It is planned for young people to be actively involved in paid roles to quality assure accommodation and to create a specific email where young people and professionals can report any concerns about their accommodation directly to ART.

26. As part of the continuous improvement and learning approach there has been a strengthening of quality assurance and the introduction of a quarterly cycle of *Learningfest* events for all staff in the Children and Families Division. The impact of this was seen and it was noted that, “*the quality assurance framework in Southwark demonstrates a reflective, self-critical approach to continuous learning and development in work with care leavers. A regular programme of auditing the experiences of care leavers clearly informs leaders as to the impact of the work undertaken.*”

Policy implications

27. In July 2021 the Corporate Parenting Committee agreed *Caring to Care: Achieving Excellence for Our Children - Southwark’s Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2024*. This reports sets out feedback on Ofsted’s assessment of the service we are providing to our Care Leavers. This report also links to the Council Delivery Plan 2022 – 2026 section on supporting families.

Financial implications

28. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts

Community impact statement

29. The decision to note this report has been judged to have a small but important impact on local people and communities. The work relating to children in care and care leavers is intended to improve the outcomes for them.
30. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, lays out the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which requires public bodies to consider all individuals when carrying out their day to day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees. It requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. The council’s Approach to Equality commits the council to ensuring that equality is an integral part of our day to day business.
31. The council’s Children’s Services involves working closely with all relevant stakeholders and partners across the sector and collectively we are committed to upholding the responsibilities towards advocating the Public Sector Equality Duty and complying with the Equalities Act 2010. 13. The PSED enables public bodies to consider the diverse needs of groups and have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. Due regard is about

considering the different needs of protected characteristics in relation to the three parts of the duty.

32. The Equalities Act 2010 define the following as protected characteristics; age; disability, gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation. Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement 15. The report takes account of the ethnicity, age and disabilities of care leavers, as well as their racial ethnic background and considers these areas in light of commitments set out by Southwark Stands Together.

Health impact statement

33. The report and inspection by Ofsted considers how we are meeting the health needs of care leavers. The Designated Doctor for Looked After Children, Designated Nurse for Looked after Children and the Virtual Mental Health Lead for Looked after Children report regularly to the committee to provide assurance on service performance for children in care and care leavers.

Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement

34. Research suggests that when children in care are compared with children who have not been in care, they tend to have poorer outcomes in a number of areas including their and mental and physical health. Corporate parenting work supporting our care leavers seeks to address these inequalities.

Climate change implications

35. There are no relevant climate change implications

Resource implications

36. There are none.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Legal implications

37. There are none.

Financial implications

38. There are none.

Consultation

39. There are none.

Assistant Chief Executive of Governance and Assurance

40. A concurrent is not required.

Strategic Director of Finance

41. A concurrent is not required.

Other officers

42. There are none.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Ofsted Focused Visit on Care Leaver Services Dec 2023
Appendix 2	Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services Sept 2022

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	David Quirke-Thornton Strategic Director of Children and Adult Services	
Report Author	Helen Woolgar, Assistant Director - Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting	
Version	Final	
Dated	19 February 2024	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Assistant Chief Executive of Governance and Assurance	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance	No	No
Cabinet Member	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	19 February 2024	