

AGENDA ITEM

**REPORT TO
CORPORATE
PARENTING BOARD**

9th February 2024

**REPORT OF DIRECTOR
OF CHILDREN'S
SERVICES**

PROGRESS UPDATE – SERVICES FOR CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

RECOMMENDATIONS

Corporate Parenting Board members are asked to note the detail contained within the report.

DETAIL

1. The ILACS inspection highlighted that the decision to merge our Care Leavers Service into Youth Support had “diluted” the time practitioners had for our Care Experienced Young People, the expertise Personal Advisors (PAs) had around services, the offer and the experience of young people leaving care was variable and therefore concluded that our Care Experienced Young People were not all receiving a high quality service and were in receipt of a service that was not good enough.
2. Our offer for Care Experienced Young People is therefore an Ofsted Improvement Priority and is cited within our Strengthening Services Plan as a priority for the directorate.
3. As part of our plan for improvement, in December 2023 the service moved from Targeted Support and into Children’s Social Care, co-located with our Children in Care Teams and we began the process of introducing young people to their new PA where required with a focus on doing this based on individual need, requirement and existing relationships. The service is now staffed with a Team Manager and overseen by the Services Lead for Children in Our Care.
4. As part of the induction process for the team we have been focussing on ensuring we know ourselves well, what we need to improve and therefore offering a service that meets need and is prepared for scrutiny from our regulator, in particular a focussed visit, given the priority for improvement status. This paper sets out to update the board of our plans to develop and prepare the service now it is in place.

Work Undertaken to Date and next steps

5. Work to date has included:

- Targeted Youth Workers expressed a preference between moving to the Care Leavers Service or staying with in Youth Support. Practitioners then undertook a skills discussion before being assigned to their respective teams in line with their preference, skills and expertise.
- Those young people who were allocated to practitioners staying within the Youth Service were identified and re-allocated to dedicated PAs.
- Transition for those young people impacted by having a change of worker was discussed on an individual basis and plans for a seamless and personalised handover were set, with the priority being the needs of the young person and the importance of minimising the impact on relationship.
- We opened the doors of a dedicated building, that care experienced young people named the No Limits Hub and will continue to co-produce the design and use of the premises.
- In December the team moved to Billingham to be co-located with the Social Work Teams, this is to develop relationships and shared practice goals and improve transition across to the service from the social work teams.
- We have begun a quality assurance in order to understand better the quality of service young people are receiving, this included individual collaborative audits, thematic audits and voice from those experiencing the service. This will further inform our focus for improvement and development.
- Practitioners will, as part of their induction, be given information around the key lines of enquiry and performance indicators considered, as part of our internal evaluation, but also the approach Ofsted will come from, as per the handbook, so they are prepared for a focussed visit, should one occur.
- An Instagram page has been developed for the children in care council 'Lets Take Action' this will be aimed at age 14+. This will provide opportunity to share what's on at the hub and generate interest in Let's Take Action.
- The recruitment for a Team Manager was completed and the officer took up post on 3rd January 2024.
- As the Board are aware, the ongoing LGA peer review is supporting a review of the function and impact of the Corporate Parenting role including that of CPB. Further work is needed to ensure that children and young people and key partner agencies are part of CPB .

Progress against the Service Improvement Plan and Practice Development Plans.

6. Personal Advisers are having weekly development sessions with managers focusing on issues such as writing good case summaries, Pathway Planning, working with care experienced parents etc. There is a development plan in place to outline these

sessions. There is inconsistency between PAs in understanding of legislation and practice.

7. There is a weekly Mentoring arrangement in place for the two Lead Practitioners who have supervisory responsibility for Personal Advisers. There is weekly Mentoring in place for the Team Manager to focus on progress against the Improvement Plan and service development. This is separate from the required supervision.
8. Clear standards are being set with Personal Advisers around issues such as frequency of statutory visits for care experienced young people.
9. An audit tool has been developed for this service area and is being used to increase understanding of the quality of case work. However operational demands have impacted on number completed. The Children's Services Improvement Consultant and Quality and Practice team have agreed to assist. Audit work is being undertaken by managers with the minimum rate of 2 cases per month per manager.
10. A data set is being developed for this service area, to help us to know the service and focus improvement activity.
11. The care leavers offer is at final draft stage and will be shown to young people to obtain their views. Once finalised, young people will be able to access it via a QR code. Young people will also be provided with a hard copy.
12. The work of the Pathway Plan Reviewing Officer has been considered and alternative arrangements are being made to improve her capacity. This means that where an urgent review is needed within 28 days, that this will be done by the Team Manager, and all reviews for care experienced people over 21 will soon be done by the Lead Practitioners, following some development sessions with them to broaden their skill set and give them confidence in this area. This will mean that the Reviewing Officer will have the capacity to undertake good quality reviews and escalate matters appropriately, holding the service to account. Further work is required to ensure all young people will be present for their own review and actively participating in their own planning.
13. An escalation policy for the service reviewing officer is being drafted to ensure that there is a clear process with escalations graduated to Team Manager, Service Lead, and AD according to seriousness and persistence of the issue. Escalations will provide additional practice feedback.
14. The Assistant Director - HR is leading on work experience and apprenticeships for our young people. One young person started work experience to help him get 'work ready' for an apprenticeship this September. There are two care experienced young people in apprenticeships in Children's Services currently. Adult Services have offered work experience within residential and day provision for adults in need.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

15. There are no specific financial implications arising from the detail in this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

16. This ongoing development work assists the Local Authority to comply with its legal responsibilities arising from primary legislation including the Children Act 1989 and the Children and Families Act 2014. It also supports compliance with the wide range of regulations and statutory guidance that exists to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in our care and care leavers.

RISK ASSESSMENT

17. As a highly regulated sector, Ofsted scrutinise the role of the local authority in putting the right support and services in place for care experienced young people. This is considered at a strategic leadership and management level as well as at practice level. Our ILACS inspection earlier this year noted a number of areas of improvement that directly impact upon the experience and progress of care experienced young people. Alongside our moral and ethical responsibility to the young people who we care for, it is also important that we continue to evidence our commitment and strengthen our approach as failure to do so may result in heightened scrutiny by Ofsted.

CONSULTATION, INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

18. The development of the service for care experienced young people has oversight from the Lead Member for Children's Services and this report provides an update for all CPB members. Alongside this, care experienced young people are actively involved in the design and development of the service as are representatives from key partner agencies.

Name of Contact Officer: Ruth Lacey
Post Title: Interim Assistant Director – Children in Our Care and Care Leavers
Email address: ruth.lacey@stockton.gov.uk