

Swindon Borough Council

Care Leavers

Service Report

Our Vision

In its role as Corporate Parent Swindon Borough Council wants to achieve the same good outcomes for our looked after children as any parent would wish for their children. We want our looked after children to have similar opportunities and chances in life to that of children growing up in their own families.

We will seek to provide looked after children with the support and help that they need to reach their potential during childhood and into adult life. We provide our looked after children with good quality placements and ensure that they receive a good education and good health care. Planning for gradual development to independence should be age appropriate and be throughout any child's life. There is no difference for a young person who has been brought up in care, and the expectation is that throughout his/her time in care each child/young person will be supported in acquiring and developing independence skills across all aspects of their life.

Like any good parent we will assist our young people through higher education or into employment or training opportunities, and ensure that they have somewhere suitable to live once they leave their care placement. To do this we provide every young person aged between 16 and 25 who qualify for leaving care services with a social worker or Personal Advisor (all those under 18 will be allocated to a qualified social worker), who will provide support and guidance, and work with other agencies to help the young person gain access to wider support services. These may include services from adult social care and health services for care leavers who have learning difficulties or mental health problems.

Our Objectives

- To motivate and assist each young person to reach their potential for education, training and employment so that they can achieve independence
- To promote their good health by encouraging a healthy sexual, emotional and physical lifestyle
- To facilitate and support them in suitable accommodation
- To help them to maintain positive family and social/friendship relationships
- To assist them to be financially independent, and be able to budget, and to save and manage their money.
- To provide them with an allocated worker to support them in their aspirations.

Context

Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

This Act provides the legal framework for the policy and arrangements in respect of young people leaving the care of the local authority, and after care services. The local authority has a duty to prepare looked after young people for the time when

they leave care. Children's Social Care has a range of duties and powers to provide after care advice and assistance to these young people, and to those who have been accommodated by other specified agencies. Good Corporate Parents will provide young people with help and support to access education, employment and training opportunities and to find accommodation suitable to meet their needs.

Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and Care Leavers' (England) Regulations 2010

The 201 Regulations clarified the requirement of the 2008 Act for looked after children moving from accommodation regulated by the Care Standards Act 2000 (or semi-independent accommodation) into other accommodation to have a statutory review chaired by their Independent Reviewing Officer. It also introduced the requirement for local authorities to pay a Higher Education Bursary for certain *former relevant* young people and the right of care leavers under 25 years of age wanting to access education or training to resume support from a personal advisor.

In March 2014 – April 2014 Swindon Borough Council was inspected by Ofsted and the judgement for the experiences and progress for care leavers was Requires Improvement -

- Ensure that all care leavers have a pathway plan of high quality, and prioritise planning to raise the proportion of care leavers who are in education, employment or training.
- Ensure that all care leavers receive independence training to equip them with sufficient skills, such as managing money, to help them to live independently.

The Leaving Care Team

At December 2015 the Leaving Care team worked with 147 young people aged 18-25 years; the team was restructured as part of a wider redesign of teams across social care to improve services to children, young people and their families. For care leavers this would be an opportunity for earlier involvement of the Personal Adviser to provide advice and support to the young person and their social worker, so that this information is used to set ambitious targets in order to drive up their attainment and progress. At the age of 16, all looked after children will now be allocated a Personal Adviser by the Team Manager of the Leaving Care Team.

Transition to adulthood for looked after children should not just start on their 16th birthday; preparation for a time when they will no longer be looked after should be integral to the **care planning** process throughout their entire time in care.

Each young person's Pathway Plan will be based on and include their care plan and will set out the actions that must be taken by the responsible authority, the young person, their parents, their carers' and the full range of agencies, so that each young person is provided with the services they need to enable them to achieve their successful transition to adulthood. The Pathway Plan should have been concluded within three months of the young person's 16th birthday.

As well as starting to plan for the future, including higher education and career ambitions, this will be an opportunity to establish whether the young person has special needs that ought to be considered as they enter adulthood and to ensure that other services such as Adult Social Care and Housing can begin their planning.

The assessment of needs should address the following:

- The nature and level of contact and personal support to be provided, and by whom, to the young person
- Details of the accommodation the young person is to occupy.
- A detailed plan for the education or training of the young person.
- How the responsible authority will assist the young person in relation to employment or other purposeful activity or occupation.
- The support to be provided to enable the young person to develop and sustain appropriate family and social relationships
- A programme to develop the practical and other skills necessary for the young person to live independently.
- The financial support to be provided to the young person, in particular where it is to be provided to meet his/her accommodation and maintenance needs.
- The health needs, including any mental health needs, of the young person, and how they are to be met.
- Contingency plans for action to be taken by the authority should the Pathway Plan for any reason cease to be effective.

The views of the young person must be recorded and incorporated into the pathway plan and a copy of the plan must be given to the young person.

The Pathway Plan is reviewed by a statutory review chaired by the young person's Independent Reviewing Officer within 3 months of their 16th birthday and thereafter every 6 months or sooner if required.

The partnership working between social worker, family members, carers, Virtual School, designated LAC nurse, and other relevant professionals is vital if actions and outcomes are to be achieved.

Education Employment Training

A good standard of education is a key driver towards achieving positive employment outcomes in adulthood. However, there remains a significant gap between the educational achievements of care leavers and their peers.

There are several factors that impact on poor education results for looked after children and, historically we know that care leavers have not been successful in the area of education, employment and training; the rate of care leavers not in education, employment or training (NEET) on their 19th, 20th or 21st birthday as at end of the year was at 50.7%. This is an increase from 2014/15 and is higher than the national average of 38.0% and the stat neighbour average of 38.7%

What we have done

- We have identified a named worker from the Youth Engagement Worker (ETE) to support the Leaving Care Team with our Care Leaver cohort
- Given the need for earlier promotion of education, employment and training at the Pathway Planning stage there is the development of the Routes2Employment Pilot; project meetings has focused on the inclusion of Team Managers to help plan and deliver the project, to raise awareness and to unblock barriers that are identified during the process and to support children to reach their goals.
- Two Personal Advisors & Social Worker in the Leaving Care Team have recently been trained to act facilitators with a group of Year 12 students for the Planning Live event. This will make the concept more sustainable, so that we can start delivering these events in-house in the future.
- Lead Consultant (Virtual School) has also attended the training above and will be involved in future events and to improve the transition processes for our carer leavers.
- In September 15 the Head of Service undertook an audit/spot check of some Pathway Plans which highlighted that the vast majority did not meet the standards required by law. In January 2016 the original Pathway Plans were re-audited by the Review Team Manager using the same audit template; there was improvement in practice, however, there is further room for improvement.

What we will do

Ensure that Pathway Plans are formatted that supports best practice to ensure that children in care and care leavers get the support they need from schools, colleges, universities and the local authority to maximise their educational attainment and employment opportunities

Ensure all workers are aware of the 'Skills support for Care Leavers' (updated Dec 2015) and are utilising this to support care leavers to understand further education options and the range of supports available.

Improve transition processes – work closely with the new Virtual Head/Lead Consultant to ensure that more care leavers enter adulthood in appropriate and more aspirational destinations, including input into post 16 Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

Annual Care Leaver Survey will be undertaken to ascertain the views of the care leaver cohort on a number of subjects including education.

Health

Children often enter the care system with a poorer level of physical and mental health than their peers, and their longer-term outcomes remain worse. Two thirds of looked after children have at least one physical health complaint, and nearly half have a mental health disorder. Care leavers frequently tell us that they encounter a lack of support in accessing appropriate services. They often feel that the

professionals working close to them do not have an understanding of their needs, particularly in respect of mental health. Care leavers also face difficulties around the transition from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to adult services.

Improving the health and well-being of children in care remains a priority for Swindon Borough Council and Swindon Clinical Commissioning Group. The Ofsted and CQC inspection in 2014 highlighted several areas for improvement; one being the need to improve capacity within our children looked after health service.

What we have done

At the end of 2015 the CQC agreed to fund a Specialist Nurse for Children in Care to work alongside the Designated Nurse for Children in Care; this post has now been advertised and will add capacity to improve the health support to care leavers.

The Designated Nurse for Children Looked After currently holds 'surgeries' for care leavers to attend with their foster carer, social worker or Personal Adviser. This includes the preparation of the young persons' Health Passport.

The Designated Nurse meets regularly with Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Sexual Health Services and GPs

Currently under review is Swindon Preparing for Adulthood – Transition Protocol for Young People with Additional Needs.

What we will do

Ensure all care leavers receive a copy of their health summary/passport prior to leaving care/in preparation for leaving care.

Ensure the guidance for transitions to adulthood is rolled out to the workforce across education, health and social care as they support young people and their families plan for the transition from childhood to adult life.

Ensure independent living skills covers issues relating to healthy living and establish sexual health pathway for Care Leavers.

Accommodation/Housing

Care leavers are a vulnerable group of young adults who have particular needs in relation to housing and homelessness. Around a quarter of those living on the streets have a background in care.

The majority of care leavers leave care by the age of 18 and rising demands on social housing and other accommodation is making it increasingly difficult for young people to find suitable accommodation as they enter adulthood.

Care leavers are leaving a comparatively supportive environment earlier compared to their peers who on average leave home at 24 than other young people and are less prepared to leave.

The DfE has worked closely with Ofsted on their revised inspection framework, which now has a specific judgement on the quality of support provided to care leavers. Local authorities will be judged on the accommodation they provide to all care leavers and will only receive a 'good' judgement if they can demonstrate they provide accommodation that "*is appropriate for each young person to safely develop their independence skills*" and where they "*are safe and feel safe*".

Statutory guidance is already clear that B&B accommodation is not considered to be suitable accommodation. In response to the findings of the Education Select Committee, following its review of post-16 care leaver support, DfE has amended guidance to make clear that emergency placements in B&B should be exceptional and limited to no more than two working days. We believe this strikes the right balance - setting clear expectations about the quality of support for young people, while retaining the flexibility necessary to ensure that B&B can be used if it the best way to meet a young person's needs.

The legislation most relevant to care leavers' accommodation needs is the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, which imposes accommodation duties on local authorities to support certain categories of looked-after children and care leavers.

In providing accommodation for young care leavers, the regulations and guidance stipulate that local authorities should:

- avoid moving and disrupting young people who are settled
- assess young people's needs and prepare them for any move
- offer a choice of accommodation (where practicable)
- provide a support package to go with the accommodation
- have a contingency plan in case accommodation arrangements break down

In Swindon the percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation was 84.5% at end of Dec 2015, equating to 82 young people for care leavers aged between 18 and 21 and who were in touch with the local authority. The national average was 81% in 14/15 and Swindon has improved from 76% in 14/15. 21 year olds have the lowest percentage in suitable accommodation in Swindon with 62% compared with 77% nationally last year.

Overall there were 97 young people in the co-hort at the end of December 15, but 10 were 'not in touch' with the local authority and in line with the dataset guidance must be recorded as not living in suitable accommodation. The remaining 5 young people were reported to be living in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The

Swindon Borough Council have an established "Staying Put" arrangements to ensure that care leavers can continue to live with and get support from their former foster carers.

Table- Type of accommodation

Number of care leavers aged 19 to 21 by type of accommodation

(As at end of Dec 15)

Placement Type	Total
B - With Parents or relatives	12
C - Community Home	2
D - Semi-Independent, Transitional	14
E - Supported Lodgings	5
T - Foyers	4
U - Independent Living	30
V - Emergency Accommodation	1
W - Bed and Breakfast	1
X - In Custody	2
Y - Other Accommodation	10
Z - With Former foster carers	5
Not known	11
Grand Total	97

What we have done

The Needs Analysis for Swindon's Sufficiency Strategy has been completed and outlines what is required by Swindon Borough Council in order to meet its' Sufficiency Duty and includes (i) Swindon Borough Council will take its' corporate parenting responsibilities beyond the age of 18 years to support all care leavers in reaching their potential (ii) a range of accommodation options will be provided to care leavers who do not remain in staying put arrangements including supported lodgings, supported housing, semi-independent and independent living arrangements and (iii) Swindon Borough Council will work proactively with children in care to prevent the need for young people approaching Housing Services for temporary accommodation either on or before their 18th birthday.

August 2015 the start of the fostering recruitment campaign to recruit in-house foster carers and increase capacity and range of local placement options commenced.

In December 2015 saw the implementation of the first stage of the commissioning and placements process through one team for seeking internal and external placements that are outcome focused to meet the needs of our children in care.

In February 16 there was the first meeting of the Supported Housing for Young People Commissioning Group; this was a useful starting point for discussion to agree a model of assessment and access to alternative supported housing options and support framework for Swindon's care leavers. There is a follow up workshop in March 16 that will continue developing positive pathways to adulthood.

What will we do?

Review the arrangements with Independent Fostering Agencies and residential providers, especially with regard to adolescent provision and housing options, ensuring that all placements comply with legal duties and responsibilities of the local authority and national minimum standards.

Ensure that no Care Leavers are accommodated in Bed & Breakfast accommodation other than on an emergency basis for no longer than 2 days.

Develop a resourced action plan to deliver the Internal and External Placement Commissioning programme.

Overview and Summary

The Leaving Care Team has had extended periods during 2014/15 where the management team has not been at full capacity. Positively there is permanent staff in place who are committed and energised to achieving the very best for children and young people in care in Swindon.

We know what the challenges are and will over the next 6 months identify, prioritise and implement an action plan for the service, focusing on outcomes, and ensuring the role of the Personal Advisers and Leaving Care Team is consistently effective and with the work of the Independent Reviewing service there will be rigorous scrutiny and challenge of the quality of pathway plans to improve and support children/young people to achieve their aspiration.

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Children Looked After & Care Leavers

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