

Cabinet

25 July 2023

Ofsted Focused Visit to Care Leaver Service For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr B Quayle, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s): All

Executive Director: T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

This report provides a summary of the findings from the Ofsted focused visit to Dorset Children's Services on 17th and 18th May 2023. Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for 16 and 17-year-old care leavers.

Ofsted's headline findings were that:

'Leaders have significantly strengthened support and services for care leavers and have made notable improvements in the quality and standard of their accommodation. This was an area for development at the last inspection'.

Ofsted identified just one area under what needs to improve in this area of social work practice, as follows:

The quality and timeliness of supervision.

Recommendation:

The recommendation is for members to note the contents of this report and the action plan to address areas for improvement.

Reason for Recommendation:

This report provides members with an overview of the Ofsted focussed visit and our intended actions to further strengthen our service and experiences for care leavers in Dorset.

1. Main Findings

- 1.1. This focused visit was carried out in line with the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework, which was updated to include a specific judgment on the experiences of care leavers in April 2023.
- 1.2. Unlike full Ofsted ILACs inspections, focused visits do not include Ofsted awarding an overall judgement on the service. Rather, Ofsted draft a letter of their findings, inclusive of their 'headline findings', and 'what needs to improve in this area of social work practice'.
- 1.3. The findings from the visit about the service were overwhelmingly positive. As indicated above, the summary headline finding identified was that *'Leaders have significantly strengthened support and services for care leavers and have made notable improvements in the quality and standard of their accommodation. This was an area for development at the last inspection'*.
- 1.4. The headline finding reflects the significant number of positive developments and improvements made to services for care leavers since the full Ofsted ILACs inspection in November 2021, and a reflection on the effectiveness of the Care Leaver Delivery Group, which has led the improvement work, chaired by the Elected Member Lead for Safeguarding.
- 1.5. Ofsted reported that our care leavers receive strong and effective support and have access to a wide range of specialist services. They found that senior leaders know the strengths and areas to strengthen within the care leaver service well and acknowledged that since the previous ILACS inspection (October 2021) there has been a strong focus on improving the help and support that care leavers receive.
- 1.6. We were able to evidence that our care leavers receive strong support and have access to a wide range of specialist services. They are supported by skilled and dedicated personal advisers. Ofsted noted that personal advisers care about and have empathy for the young people they work

with. They know their young people well and are proud of all achievements and aspirations.

- 1.7 Personal advisers encourage young people to complete their pathway plans and Ofsted noted that when this happens, records capture the voice, wishes and feelings of young people well.
- 1.8 Our local offer for care leavers is considered as strong and continues to grow and develop.
- 1.9 Children in care are allocated a personal adviser at 16, this is a recent change to practice and strengthens the developing relationship between the young person and personal adviser, meaning there is a seamless transition of primary worker when the young person reaches 18.
- 1.10 Ofsted were satisfied that personal advisers help care leavers to access education, employment, or training. When this is not possible there is input and support from the virtual school headteacher and other agencies. We were able to demonstrate our collaborative approach to tracking and monitoring the young people who are not engaged in education, training, or employment.
- 1.11 Services we have developed to combat and reduce exploitation were seen by Ofsted as “particularly impressive”. The community-based approaches, to develop ‘safer locations’ for young people are supported by members of the community. Specific reference was made about the ‘Pineapple Project’, which supports young women who have experience of criminal and sexual exploitation.
- 1.12 Ofsted acknowledged the progress made in respect of housing and accommodation for care leavers since the last inspection. Young people are now benefiting from a focused management and corporate approach to ensure that care leavers have access to and live in suitable housing.

2. **Post Ofsted action plan**

- 2.1 Under ‘what needs to improve in this area of social work practice’, Ofsted identified just one area, that being the quality and timeliness of supervision. Our file audits, quality assurance processes and management oversight had already identified this as a key priority for improvement work.

2.2 In addition, within the body of the report, Ofsted noted that a small number of young people are disadvantaged in respect of council tax relief because they live out of county or live with partners or in shared accommodation. It is accurate that the council's policy in respect of care leavers and council tax is that we will not charge care leavers living in Dorset for council tax. This does not apply however if the care leaver is living with a partner or in shared accommodation. Care leavers who live outside of our area are still required to pay council tax in their area of residence. Ofsted described this as inequitable. As a result, we will be reviewing our policy and carrying out an equalities impact assessment.

2.3 Our action plan for addressing areas requiring improvement is attached.

3. **Financial Implications**

3.1 There are no direct financial implications of this report. In all that we do today we aim to equip children and young people 'for life'. This includes supporting all care leavers from 16 to 25 years. The Investment in the Leaving Care Service has increased management and personal adviser capacity meaning we are now in a strong position to deliver ever better services.

4. **Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**

4.1 By increasing housing and suitable accommodation within Dorset a reduction in travel and associated emissions is in line with the council's priority of protecting the natural environment, climate, and ecology.

5. **Well-being and Health Implications**

5.1 Care leavers have access to the health services they need. Proactive collaboration with adult services and other partner agencies helps to smooth out transitions for young people into adult services. This has brought success as our young people receive timely health assessments, and medicals for unaccompanied children seeking children are redesigned to meet their particular needs.

6. **Other Implications**

6.1 Positive outcomes from Ofsted inspection activity enhances the reputation of the Council.

7. **Risk Assessment**

7.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: **Low**

Residual Risk: **Low**

8. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

8.1 As per above we will be undertaking an equalities impact assessment in respect of the impact of our existing policy on council tax relief for care leavers.

9. **Appendices**

1- Ofsted focussed visit letter dated 22 June 2023

2- Post Ofsted action plan dated 27 June 2023

10. **Background Papers**

None.