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MILTON KEYNES SERVICES FOR CARE LEAVERS

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Report Summary

Purpose:

This report details the activity of the Leaving Care function within the Corporate Parenting Team. It provides a summary of the work delivered and undertaken by the service in relation to the criteria Ofsted will be using in their judgment of the services for Care Leavers at their next inspection.

Background:

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 requires Councils to assess and meet the needs of young people aged 16 and 17 who are in care or care leavers, and help care leavers aged 18-25, especially with education and employment and accommodation.

Corporate Priorities:

Improving the quality of the services to care leavers contributes to good outcomes for Milton Keynes' Looked After Children. This is in line with the council's Children & Families - Priority 4: To develop and maintain effective intervention that prevent the most vulnerable children and young people in our communities from experiencing additional difficulty and prevents them from suffering significant harm.

Performance Information:

The Leaving Care service will be inspected and evaluated within the new Ofsted inspection framework. This will include a separate "Leaving Care" sub-judgment. In addition, there are two key Leaving Care performance indicators measuring accommodation and education, employment and training outcomes for care leavers aged 19. These indicators will be expanded to include 20 and 21 year olds.

Equality and Diversity Impact:

The Corporate Parenting Team provides services and support for young people from across the Milton Keynes' community and also includes young unaccompanied asylum seekers. The placements and supports provided must meet the diverse needs of the children and young people in the Council's care.

Recommendations:

That the report be noted.

FULL REPORT

1 Introduction

The Milton Keynes Corporate Parenting Team works closely with young people to equip them with the knowledge and skills for a successful transition into independence. Care Leavers are a vulnerable group of young people with complex and varied needs. Services to improve their outcomes are individually tailored according to their needs and involve multi agency working with a variety of other agencies and professionals.

Since February 2013, the Milton Keynes Leaving Care service has been incorporated into the Corporate Parenting Team, ensuring a smoother transition into adulthood by removing the point of transfer between the two previously separate teams. The team works with young people leaving and preparing to leave care from the ages of 16 years to 21 years, extended to 25 years if the young person is attending education. The team deliver the council's Corporate Parenting responsibilities, providing advice, support, and financial assistance and being part of each young person's support network.

The leaving care element of the Corporate Parenting Team consists of a Deputy Team Manager, 7 Social Work Assistants (Personal Advisors), and a Business Support Worker. A Connexions Progression Advisor is based within the service two days per week.

The Corporate Parenting Team currently supports 121 young people:

- Relevant young people (care leavers aged 16 and 17) - 11
- Former relevant young people (care leavers aged 18+) - 110

The level of support a Care Leaver can expect from a local authority is determined by national legislation and guidance. Following consultation with Care Leavers, Milton Keynes has adopted a local version of the National Charter for Care Leavers. The charter is designed to raise the expectations, aspirations, and understanding of Care Leavers and to enable local authorities better to meet their needs.

This report provides a position statement on how Care Leavers are supported by the council through the activities of the Corporate Parenting Team. The structure of the report follows the criteria that will be used by Ofsted to judge the council's Leaving Care services.

2 Keeping Care Leavers Safe

Care leavers are safe and feel safe, particularly where they are living, and are helped to understand how their life choices will affect their safety and well-being. Any risks associated with offending, drug or alcohol misuse, going missing or with sexual exploitation are known by adults who have a responsibility for them and effective plans are in place to reduce the risk of or actual harm to them. Care leavers are supported to take responsibility for their behaviour.

A range of support options are available for Milton Keynes Care Leavers, depending upon their individual needs.

Milton Keynes Housing and Children's Social Care have jointly commissioned **supported accommodation** from St Mungo's, who provide 52 beds in 5 units across the city for a range of young people in housing need. A fortnightly joint

young people's housing panel considers referrals and risk assessments and decides where each young person is best placed.

Two of the St Mungo's units are used as initial assessment centres, and another provides for young people with high needs. The young people follow an individually agreed route through the St Mungo's pathway which, if successful, leads to independent accommodation via a tenancy with the council or a housing association.

When a Care Leaver is placed at St Mungo's a project keyworker works closely with the young person and their Personal Advisor to monitor progress and identify any issues or risks at an early stage. Other agencies are involved as necessary to address identified risks and access further support.

The St Mungo's assessment and higher needs units have an increased level of staffing to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the young people. A "missing" protocol is in place to ensure that St Mungo's immediately inform the relevant agencies if the young person is missing or not staying at the accommodation.

Young people in **foster care** in Milton Keynes who are aged 18 and over can remain with their foster carers under the **Staying Put** Policy whilst they remain engaged in education or are assessed as vulnerable. This supports their later transition to independence at a point appropriate to their individual circumstances.

Milton Keynes Care Leavers are a priority for **social housing**. A housing application is made when the young person is aged 16. The offer of accommodation will be made when the young person is 18, but can be deferred if they are not ready to take on their own tenancy.

Each young person is allocated a named housing officer. Personal Advisors and housing officers work closely together with young people to resolve any issues and avoid tenancy problems or eviction. A floating support service is available to provide additional support if required.

Whilst Milton Keynes Care Leavers have priority status for social housing, they (in common with other priority groups) experience a lack of choice due to the wider pressures on social housing. Many of the available properties are in areas of the city which experience a higher incidence of social issues, increasing young people's support needs.

Care Leavers in **independent accommodation** are supplied with a health and safety pack (smoke detectors, a carbon monoxide detector, a door security chain, a Chubb lock, a fire blanket and a first aid kit). A suitability assessment is undertaken of any privately rented property.

The adult transitions team is routinely made aware of 14 year old Children in Care with **Special Educational Needs**, to ensure a smooth transition, where required, to post 18 support from the council's **adult social care services**. Some other young people who do not have SEN may also require an adult services assessment, which is arranged as soon as their on-going need is identified.

3 Planning For Care Leavers

Pathway planning is effective and plans (including transition planning for looked after children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities) address all young people's needs and are updated as circumstances change.

In line with the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, all Care Leavers are allocated a Personal Advisor (PA). The role of the PA is to develop a **Pathway Plan** with the care leaver. The Pathway Plan is first initiated when the young person is 15¾ years of age. It sets out the support the young person will receive in preparing to leave care, after they leave care, and as they move into adult life. The plan covers areas such as accommodation, housing support, education, training, employment, personal development, contact with family, and health, including sexual and emotional health.

Pathway Plans should be reviewed 6 monthly but may be reviewed sooner if there is a significant change of circumstances. With the young person's consent, family members, carers or other professionals can contribute towards the plan. The Deputy Team Manager carries out a monthly audit of Pathway Plans.

The percentage of Pathway Plans completed within the required timescale has fallen due to reduced PA capacity since September 2013. A PA vacancy has now been filled and close management oversight is in place to ensure that this unacceptable level of performance is addressed by the end of January 2014.

Pathway plan timely completion rates:

September 2013: 93%

October 2013: 81.50%

November 2013: 71.50%

4. The Health of Care Leavers

The health needs of care leavers are clearly assessed, prioritised and met. Child and adolescent mental health services, adult mental health provision, therapeutic help and services for learning or physically disabled young people and adults are available when they are needed.

The Corporate Parenting Team includes 2 jointly-funded Children in Care health workers. Annual Health Assessments for Children in Care take a holistic approach, including offering advice to young people on health related matters such as sexual health, the dangers of substance misuse, keeping safe, preparation for independent living and taking care of their own health in adulthood.

Care Leavers' individual health needs are highlighted in their health care plans. The nurses compile an overview of each young person's health history. These personal health records are passed to young people before their final child care review. Some Care Leavers need support and guidance whilst they adapt to managing their own health needs. This is provided by their personal advisor. They can also access advice from the Children in Care Nurses and receive information signposting them to other relevant services (e.g. health, lifestyle issues, recreation).

Health transitions are monitored and, where necessary, progressed at management level between CAMHS and adult mental health services and between MKC children's and adults' services. Interagency specialist commissioning arrangements are in place to address complex health needs which cannot be met by local services, for example, when a young person's mental health needs cannot be met by local CAMHS provision.

5 Key Documents for Adult Life

Care leavers have access to and understand their full health history and are provided with all key documents they need to begin their lives as young adults, for example national insurance numbers, birth certificates and passports.

The LAC health records compiled by the nurses provide an overview of all the young person's health needs, including past medical interventions, and their health history throughout their time in care. Young people receive a copy of their records in time for their final child care review.

When a young person is aged 17 ½, a Personal Advisor works jointly with the social worker to ensure a smooth transition to post-18 support arrangements. Essential tasks are agreed by the two workers and the young person, including checking, and if necessary obtaining, essential documentation such as a National Insurance number, birth certificate and passport.

6 Developing Skills for Adulthood

Care leavers develop the skills and confidence they need to maximise their chances of successful maturity to adulthood, including parenthood. This includes learning to budget, to live independently and to manage safe relationships and behaviour. Care leavers form and maintain relationships with carers and staff from the local authority and develop supportive relationships within the community, including where appropriate contact with family and friends. They are confident that the local authority will act as a reasonable parent in supporting their transition into adulthood and providing practical, emotional and financial support until they are at least 21 and, where necessary, until they are 25. This will include the availability of a trusted and known adult (for example, the allocated personal adviser or their social worker) to support them.

Foster Carers encourage and support Children in Care to prepare for independence in line with their individual Pathway Plan. Care leavers in other placements are similarly supported by their placement keyworkers and their PA.

A "**Get ready for adult life** pack" is given to each young person when their Pathway Plan is initiated at age 15¾. The pack has 10 sections, each containing activity sheets for the young person to complete with their carers or workers:

1. Money
2. Health
3. Education, training, and employment
4. Family and relationships
5. Accommodation
6. Looking after yourself

7. Having your say
8. Legal rights
9. Being in care
10. Life skills

PAs provide support as required by the young person. Additional budgeting training is offered by the Participation Officer and by the Connexions worker linked with the team.

Post 18, Care Leavers are offered support to maintain contact with family and to remain in education, apprenticeship, voluntary work, or to be actively seeking employment up to the age of 21. The Participation Worker arranges and encourages the young people to attend events which facilitate friendships and prevent isolation.

The **financial support** for care leavers is outlined in the Transition to Adulthood (Leaving Care) Financial Policy 2013 – 2014. The Milton Keynes setting up home allowance provides up to a total of £2170.50, in excess of the nationally recommended £2000.00.

Young people are also supported in accessing state benefits.

Young people's cases are usually closed at age 21 if they are no longer engaged in education, employment or training. However, support can be re-activated if a young person returns to education. A leaflet, "Support for care leavers aged 21 to 25 with education or training" is provided to ensure that all young people are aware of this. Currently, two young people are supported following a post 21 return to education.

It is also possible for cases to remain open post 21 if the young person's circumstances require further support or in times of crisis. Currently, two such young people are receiving support. Support is also provided to former unaccompanied asylum seeking children who have not received an outcome to their immigration application before reaching 21.

The Leaving Care element of the Corporate Parenting team has a stable workforce, which supports the development of on-going relationships with the young people.

7 Transition to Independence

Care leavers succeed in their transition to greater independence and adulthood at a time that is right for them. Young people aged 16 and 17 are encouraged to remain looked after until their 18th birthday where (and this will usually be the case) this is in their best interest. They can remain in placements beyond their 18th birthday or, where more appropriate, live in permanent and affordable accommodation that meets their needs and those of their children, where relevant.

Young people are expected to remain in their placement until aged 18. They can move earlier if they wish to do so and have the skills and abilities to succeed as Care Leavers. The council Staying Put policy enables them to remain in their foster placement post 18 if this is in their interests.

Most Milton Keynes Care Leavers are housed through Milton Keynes Council housing or a housing association, providing stable and affordable

accommodation. Application for social housing can be deferred if young people are not thought ready to gain a tenancy, avoiding the negative impact of a potential loss of a tenancy on their future housing eligibility.

A performance indicator measures the percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation on their 19th birthday. Whilst all the young people are offered support to achieve this, the target is set in the knowledge of individual young people's circumstances. The 2013/14 target is 88%. It is monitored by the Team Manager and was 86% at the end of Q3. The current circumstances of the young people in the Q4 cohort suggest that the projected year-end target of 88% will be achieved.

8 Education, Employment and Training

Care leavers have access to appropriate education and employment opportunities, including work experience and apprenticeships. They are encouraged and supported to continue their education and training, including those aged 21 to 24 years. Care leavers are progressing well and achieving their full potential through life choices, either in their attainment in further and higher education or in their chosen career/occupation.

A **Connexions Progression Advisor** works in the team with Children in Care and Care Leavers aged 16 to 20 two days per week.

In year 11, the advisor liaises with social workers and schools to ensure that young people attend guidance interviews to support their post 16 choices. The majority will go on into the 6th form or to college. If a young person decides to leave a course early, the advisor meets with them to look at their employment, education and training (EET) options.

The advisor also tracks those young people who are not in education, training or employment (NEET), and sees them regularly to look at EET options. The advisor supports them with college applications, benefit claims and obtaining and preparing for interviews with training providers. If a young person is not engaging with this, the advisor will undertake joint visits with the young person's social worker.

The advisor provides a monthly pie chart, capturing an overview of the young people's current destinations.

The advisor regularly circulates job and training opportunities to social workers. The advisor successfully encouraged NEET young people to enrol in college courses. At the start of the academic year 2013/14, the NEET figure had reduced to 9 young people (although it has since increased).

A quarterly meeting between the deputy manager and **Milton Keynes College** is in place to discuss any issues with care leaver students, and to share general information.

The **Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)** Care Leaver Strategy, October 2013, introduced a "marker" which identifies care leavers on their information database. This is designed to **reduce the number of Care Leavers who are NEET** by ensuring improved support by mainstream and specialist services.

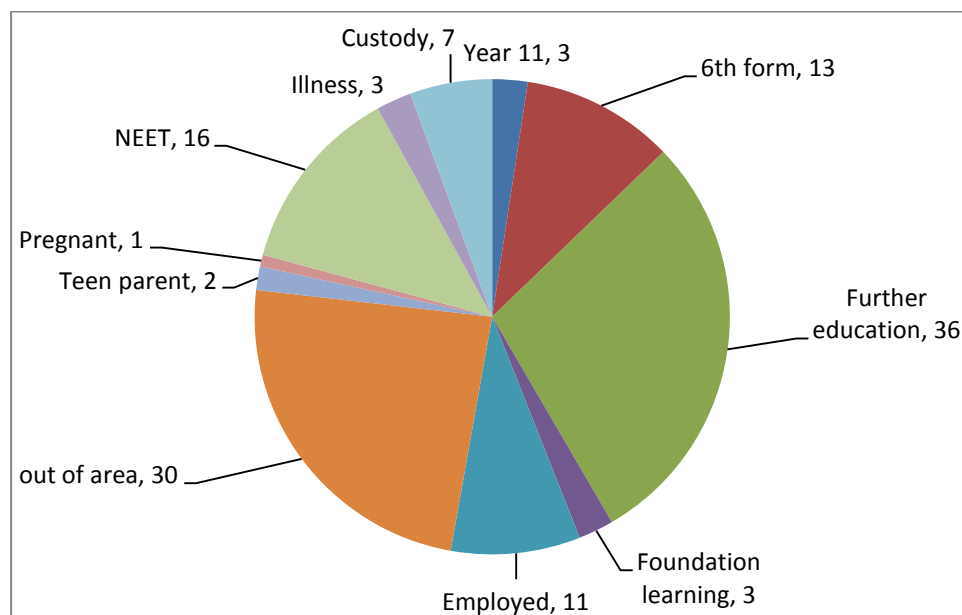
Through the Youth Contract, the DWP have provided 18-24 year olds, including care leavers, with access to additional adviser support, work experience, and apprenticeships. In Milton Keynes, a named Job Centre worker works with Care Leavers. The worker also meets quarterly with the Personal Advisors, discussing issues and sharing information. This is a well-established arrangement which is not routinely in place in other authorities. Care Leavers access the Christian Foundation, traineeships, apprenticeships, and second chance learning through this named worker.

A bi-monthly interagency NEET reduction meeting, held at Milton Keynes Job Centre Plus, provides national comparator data and up to date information about local initiatives available to support local young people into EET.

A performance indicator (NI148) measures the percentage of Care Leavers in education, training or employment on their 19th birthday. Whilst all young people receive support, encouragement and challenge to become EET, the 2013/14 local target for this indicator was set at 66%., based on information about the individual young people in the cohort. Performance at the end of Q3 was 60%. The current circumstances of the young people in the Q4 cohort suggest that the year-end figure will be 72%. .

Leaving care destinations @ 2nd December 2013

The pie chart shows the destinations of our current cohort of Care Leavers.



The group of 30 young people placed out of area are:

- NEET 5
- Unwell 3
- Education 20
- Employed 1
- ARE 1

Support for Milton Keynes Care Leavers in Higher Education

A support package, detailed in the council's Transition to Adulthood (Leaving Care) Financial Policy 2013 -2014, is available to Milton Keynes Care Leavers in Higher Education.

To qualify for this support, young people must commence their course prior to their 25th birthday:

- Young people who are undertaking full time 2, 3 or 4 year higher education courses receive a C&YPA – Higher Education Bursary of £2000.00, paid in annual instalments over the length of their course.
- They also receive a Higher Education Term Time and Vacation Accommodation Grant & Higher Education Living Expenses and Equipment Bursary/Grant, which is used in conjunction with the C&YPA HE Bursary to cover the cost of term time and vacation accommodation, living expenses and any study equipment or books. This is paid at a rate which provides the young person with a total combined grant and bursary of £5,000 a year.
- Young people also receive a one off Computer Grant of up to £300.00 (they can top-up this amount to purchase a higher specification machine). This is provided once, after the end of school year 11 (age 16), in order to purchase a computer in circumstances where young people are not able to take a computer with them from their foster or residential placement to support their on-going education.

Higher National Certificate and Higher National Diploma courses are defined as Higher Education Courses. Both HNC and HND courses often attract a bursary and/or a grant from the individual university.

The frequency and amount of each payment, as well as the method of paying the allowance, is set out in the young person's Pathway Plan. In order to assist young people with the transition to their first year at university, payment is usually made directly to the College or University for the young person's first three terms in a hall of residence. All payments are subject to young people agreeing to:

- Maintain regular contact with the Corporate Parenting Team, by phone, e-mail and one to one meetings.
- Attend all pre-arranged meetings with the Corporate Parenting Team and undertake/complete all actions and agreed tasks.
- The identification of a suitable contact within the University staff/support service to participate in joint meetings to ensure educational goals and targets are met and that appropriate practical, educational, pastoral and financial support is being provided.
- Agree to regular liaison between the University and the Corporate Parenting Team to monitor progress, attendance and attainment.
- Inform the Corporate Parenting Team of any change of circumstances (contact details, course details) as soon as possible.
- Agree to focus on educational activities by not undertaking excessive hours of employment during term time.

Currently, 8 young people are being support through University. One Care Leaver who the council previously supported to gain an engineering degree is undertaking a PhD funded by external sponsorship. He recently asked to

meet with the team manager to thank Milton Keynes Council for the support which has enabled him to progress with his studies.

9 Personal and Corporate Positive Images

Care leavers are positive about themselves. Their achievements are celebrated and the local authority shows they are positive and proud of their care leavers.

Young people's successes and positive self-images are underpinned and promoted by the everyday support and encouragement provided by carers and staff and by their wider support networks, such as schools and colleges.

Young people are listened to individually and, if they choose to engage with the council through TCTF and other consultative fora, have the opportunity to contribute to wider service developments and feed their views directly to councillors and senior managers.

The council celebrates the achievements of Children in Care and Care Leavers. The well-established annual "True Triumph" event, attended by members, staff, carers and young people's birth families marks a wide range of achievements. The virtual school held a successful education-focussed awards evening in November 2013.

Encouragement to succeed in education is underpinned by a system of financial incentives, outlined in the financial policy. In addition, workers send congratulatory cards to young people and may take them for a celebratory lunch or other activity. Gift vouchers are given to young people to celebrate them gaining an education placement or employment, especially if they have previously failed to engage.

Where appropriate, the Director of Children's Services may send a letter to young people acknowledging achievements or awards; workers are freed up to attend key events (e.g. a graduation ceremony) at young people's requests.

10 Housing

Care leavers are helped to find housing solutions that best meet their needs. Risks of tenancy breakdown are identified and alternative plans are in place.

The Corporate Parenting Team enhances the support they provide to young people by accessing the skills and expertise available across the council. In addition to the housing service and Connexions support already described, joint work with the Revenue and Benefits service ensures that discretionary payments for Council Tax are in place for all Care Leavers living in their own accommodation and provides the Personal Advisors with direct access to up to date benefits information and advice.

Personal Advisors accompany young people to meetings if they are in difficulties with their rent and council tax. They also support the young person and the council in addressing and resolving any issues of anti-social behaviour. Close working with housing colleagues includes, when necessary, sharing risk assessments in relation to young people in challenging circumstances in order to support both the young person and the local community.

Personal Advisors ensure that young people are aware of and consider all the housing options open to them and provide advice and challenge as to how their current choices will impact upon their future options. Social housing is applied for for all young people in care at age 16 years, irrespective of whether they are placed in Milton Keynes at that point.

Accommodation for care leavers is appropriate for each young person to safely develop their independence skills. Houses in multiple occupancy are only used when it is a young person's preferred option and it can demonstrably be shown to be in their best interests.

Some young people choose accommodation in the privately rented sector or make other personal choices which, despite the support offered to them, result in them not obtaining or retaining a social housing tenancy.

Suitability assessments are completed on all unregulated placements, including houses in multiple-occupancy. Property checks of houses in multiple-occupancy are carried out by two workers on a regular basis and the findings reported back to the landlords to ensure action is taken to address any identified issues.

There is a limited choice of accommodation for former unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) Care Leavers whose immigration status has not yet been determined.

11 Information

Care leavers are provided with information (including through the care leaver's pledge) about their legal entitlements such as access to their records, assistance to find employment (including work experience), training, financial support and how to complain where necessary supported by an advocate.

Milton Keynes has adopted its own version of the National Care Leavers Charter, amended following consultation with local young people.

Young people are expected and encouraged to attend their Pathway Plan review where information and entitlement information is reviewed, shared and documented in their Pathway Plan.

Milton Keynes Council has a website for young people, www.kicmk.co.uk, which provides comprehensive information to Children in Care and Care Leavers.

A set of financial leaflets, designed in partnership with young people, has recently been produced and circulated to ensure that the key points of the (detailed and lengthy) financial policy are clearly explained to young people. These leaflets outline what level of financial support Care Leavers are entitled to, depending on their individual circumstances.

A participation worker works with the young people to co-ordinate meetings and events for Care Leavers. She also oversees the kicmk website. Milton Keynes Care Leavers and Children in Care are encouraged and supported to participate in national events. A group recently took part in a consultation event with the Who Cares Trust, feeding back their views about young people's awareness of their entitlements and the best ways to communicate with young people. Care Leavers are represented on the Milton Keynes

Children in Care Council (TCTF), through which they have links with senior managers and members of the Corporate Parenting Panel.