

Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee

Corporate Parent Working Group : Leaving Care Team

Meeting: 16 November 2011

Present: Cllrs Stewart, Bell, Bonallie, MacKnight and Williams.

Also in attendance: Catherine Joyce (Leaving Care Service – Team Manager), Beverley Hunter-Smith (Leaving Care Service – Principal Case Manager), Nigel Cummings (Scrutiny Officer) and Liz Craig (Scrutiny & Area Support Assistant).

Notes:

Leaving Care Service

The Leaving Care Service was established in 1995 as part of The Children Act 1989 and subsequent Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. The service deals with approximately 200 young people aged between 15-18 years old, rising to 25 years old if in higher education.

The team consists of a Team Manager, 3 Principal Leaving Care Workers, 4.5 Social Care Workers, 2 full time and 5 part-time assistant leaving care workers and 1 engagement worker.

Transitions

For some young people and carers there is an awful lot of anxiety surrounding their transfer, this is mainly due to what the name 'transfer' implies and as a response many feel that they will be forced to leave care before they are ready.

Young people are referred from Children's Services Social Care at the start of Year 11. Each young person is allocated a social worker and information sharing meetings take place between workers with the case finally being transferred after approximately 6 weeks.

Pathway Plan

A new needs assessment and Pathway Plan was introduced with the introduction of the ICS (Integrated Children's System). The Pathway Plan has full ownership by the young person in consultation with other significant people in that young person's life. The plan is also reviewed on a 6 monthly basis.

Financial Arrangements

Income maintenance is available to 16/17 year olds living independently and NEET or where a training allowance is not paid.

A leaving care grant of £1400 is available to set up home and buy essential items to live independently e.g. TV licence, electrical goods, bedding and kitchen utensils etc.

At 18+ years old finance is dependent on individual circumstances and accommodations costs are covered by housing benefit.

The Leaving Care Team also support young people at university in line with the recommendations from the Buttle Trust (£6.6k). It should be noted that Sunderland currently has 10 young people who are at university.

Accommodation Options

Foster placements last until a young person's 18th Birthday. For those wishing to stay with their carers post 18 is very much dependent on their own circumstances, e.g. those in further education that qualify for university will mean that the council will continue to pay the fostering rate until the end of the academic year. It was also noted that for those in statutory education until they are 19 i.e. SEN young people the council will pay a supported lodgings rate that does not impact on carers benefits. For those in further education such as vocational courses we don't pay anything.

The LA has 7 supported lodgings across the city with 9 available places. These supported lodgings are £124 a week bed and board with limited support, for the right young people.

There is also a 6 bed supported accommodation unit at Burlington Close which has 24 hour support and is used for the more vulnerable or at risk young people leaving care.

The LA also has 14 trainer flats which are made available by Gentoo and help young people to adjust to independent living and are supported by staff from the Burlington Close unit.

There are also regional supported accommodation providers which are funded by Supporting People and means that there is a variety of accommodation provision to meet the needs of all young people leaving the LA's care.

Multi Agency Approach

The Leaving Care Team also works with a number of other agencies including:

Connexions Service
YDAP (Youth, Drug and Alcohol Project)

Accommodation Project
Links with Child and Family Psychiatry
Young Parents Project

Transitions Guidance

There is a higher education bursary available of £2000 but as already stated the LA pays £6,600.

Access to Leaving Care Service up to 25 years old.

Established minimum standards regarding accommodation moves.

Areas for Continuous Improvement

Look at how the LA can improve the transition arrangements to the service and from the service.

Continue to improve the accommodation options for those young people who are difficult to place.

Improve the tracking arrangements for 18+ young people who are unemployed.

Continue the training with foster carers and residential workers.

Review and monitor the financial arrangements that support young people leaving care including higher education fees and investigating best practice from other LA's.

It was noted that it was very rare for a young person to be accommodated in a B&B because everywhere else is full. This only really happens in an unplanned way, if everyone follows the pathway plan there should be no real or unforeseen issues.