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Dear Mr Loades

Focused visit to Redbridge local authority children's services

This letter summarises the findings of a focused visit to the London Borough of Redbridge children's services on 12 and 13 December 2018. The inspectors were Anne Waterman, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Andy Whippey, Her Majesty's Inspector.

Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for care leavers. They looked at a range of evidence, including through case discussions with care leavers, personal advisers, social workers and managers. They also looked at local authority performance management and quality assurance information and young people's case records.

Overview

Most care leavers are seen regularly by their personal advisers, who know them well. The majority of care leavers are in accommodation that meets their needs. However, the quality of the support that care leavers receive is not consistent. The service is delivered through a partnership arrangement, and since the last inspection in 2016, there have been significant gaps in management, which have impacted on service development and delivery. Managers have focused successfully on compliance issues, but there has not been a sufficient focus on quality. Although senior managers are aware of the areas which require improvement and have appropriate plans in place, there has been a lack of pace in implementing and embedding the changes.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice

- The information provided to care leavers to explain their rights and entitlements, including access to accommodation
- The transition process leading up to young people leaving care
- The quality and timeliness of pathway planning
- Access to health histories and support for emotional and mental health issues
- The coordination of arrangements to develop independent living skills.

Findings

- Social workers and personal advisers work hard to support care leavers. A strong focus by managers on compliance has ensured that the majority of visits are taking place in a timely way. Young people are often contacted between their visits, clearly benefiting from positive relationships with their workers. All workers who spoke to inspectors knew their young people well and were able to describe the work that they were undertaking with them. However, the purpose and outcomes of visits were not consistently clear in case records.
- Most young people are involved in preparing their pathway plans, and the plans capture their views well. Recent improvements in compliance have led to the majority of young people having an up-to-date plan, although some of these plans were started at a late stage. Some plans are not specific, measurable, attainable, relevant or time-limited, which means that it is difficult to understand how much progress a young person is making towards their goals. Managers recognise from their own audits that more work is needed to improve the quality of plans, and a programme of training is underway. While plans are routinely reviewed on a six-monthly basis, they are not always updated when there is a significant change in a young person's circumstances, which means that the plan no longer fully reflects the young person's needs.
- Care leavers aged 16 and 17 receive good support from a dedicated worker who focuses on employment, education and training (EET). Personal advisers in the leaving care service also have a clear focus on trying to ensure that young people continue with their EET arrangements. However, more needs to be done to expand the offer for care leavers once they reach 18, as numbers of care leavers not in employment, education and training (NEET) increase significantly from this point onwards. The authority recognises this and is in the process of considering how it can offer apprenticeships and can link with partners to expand opportunities for young people.
- The process for transferring young people to the care leavers' service is not embedded in practice. Inspectors saw too many cases where young people were not experiencing a smooth transfer, and, in some cases, there were long periods

of delay between contact. Some personal advisers do not meet the young people before they become care leavers. This affects their ability to develop a good relationship and has caused delay to the progression of plans. Social workers spoke of their increased knowledge of the process through working alongside the transitions worker, and recently introduced joint workshops with the children looked after and leaving care teams are also improving shared understanding across the services. However, more needs to be done to ensure that transition planning begins early enough for young people and to increase partnership working across the services.

- There is no clear, coordinated pathway to help care leavers to develop independent living skills, and no specific programme in place. Managers are aware that this an area for further development. Nevertheless, inspectors did see some examples of young people receiving appropriate support to gain skills for independence, for example through support from their foster carers or key workers at their housing provision.
- The proforma 'health passport', developed in conjunction with care leavers, captures essential information in a clear format. However, there is no system in place to record whether the health passport has been completed and given to the young person. This means that it is not possible to know whether young people are aware of their health histories.
- There are no specific health resources targeted at care leavers and this is a gap in provision. This makes it less likely that they will access support. Inspectors saw case examples where personal advisers had appropriately identified young people in need of emotional and mental health support and had signposted them to services. However, in almost all cases, the young people had not then accessed those services.
- The authority is in touch with the majority of its care leavers. In response to the Children and Social Work Act 2017, staff informed all the care leavers under the age of 25 about their entitlement to receive a service. A 'local offer', which describes the services available in greater detail, is in development, and young people are due to be further consulted in the New Year. Young people told inspectors that they did not currently understand what their rights and entitlements were, which they found frustrating. Although workers were able to explain to inspectors how young people had been informed about how to complain, for example, and about how to access an advocate or an independent visitor, this was not immediately evident in case records.
- Arrangements for securing accommodation are not clear to young people and they are not sufficiently aware of the system and of the decision-making processes involved. Young people have given their views to the authority through the 'Don't Whisper' group and via attendance at the corporate parenting board. In response to this, and as part of the development of the local offer, a housing

protocol is currently in draft format. Further work needs to be done to ensure that this can be easily understood by care leavers.

- Care leavers in custody are supported effectively through regular visits. Personal advisers continue to be aspirational for their future, and pathway plans reflect this, in particular encouraging the take-up of educational opportunities.
- Most unaccompanied asylum-seeking children or refugees receive an appropriate level of support from their personal advisers and social workers. Not all workers are aware of the processes to support asylum claims and, in a small number of cases, the lack of understanding of entitlements had caused a delay in young people receiving appropriate financial support.
- Senior managers have a good understanding of the areas in the service that require further development. The pace of improvement now needs to accelerate to ensure that care leavers are able to make a successful transition to adulthood and independence.

Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account when planning your next inspection or visit.

Yours sincerely

Anne Waterman
Her Majesty's Inspector