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Dear Pauline

Monitoring visit to Kingston upon Hull children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Kingston upon Hull City Council's children's services on 29 and 30 March 2022. This was the fifth monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in May 2019. Her Majesty's inspectors for this visit were Vicky Metherringham and Joanna Warburton.

Areas covered by the visit

Inspectors reviewed the progress made in the following areas of concern identified at the last inspection:

- The participation of care leavers.
- The quality of pathway plans and the engagement of care leavers in their development.
- The range of accommodation options for care leavers.
- Care leavers' access to mental health services.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. Inspectors were on site for the visit.

Inspectors considered a range of evidence, including children's electronic case records, performance management information, case file audits and other information provided by senior leaders. In addition, inspectors spoke to a range of staff, including elected members and social workers, and young people.

Headline findings

Skilled leaving care workers are providing greatly improved support to care leavers in Hull. A stable and determined leadership team, supported by deeply invested and committed elected members, has established a tenacious corporate parenting

partnership. As a result, care leavers are provided with improved, high-quality and targeted multi-agency support. A much-improved interface by senior leaders with care leavers means that their voice is beginning to influence service delivery.

The council has provided significant financial investment to the leaving care team. Through additional investment in staffing and the development of the refugee and asylum-seeking team, care leavers develop meaningful and supportive relationships with their workers. Staff feel extremely well supported because of the reinvigorated culture that has been created by senior leaders and effective team managers.

Findings and evaluation of progress

Leaving care workers know their care leavers exceptionally well. Care leavers experience meaningful relationships with their workers because the workforce is stable and mostly long-standing. The allocation of a worker to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children at the onset of their arrival to the city provides them with effective support from their worker.

Workers are persistent at keeping in touch and visit care leavers frequently. Improved management oversight provides workers with advice when care leavers refuse to see their worker. Creative approaches to maintain regular visits are made, even when care leavers live some distance away. Care leavers are provided with a detailed understanding of the newly agreed local offer, which contains 10 priority areas of support that have been developed with them. Visits provide care leavers with an opportunity to engage in purposeful discussions, which they value. Meaningful direct work provides improved practical, emotional and financial support. Care leavers also benefit from a drop-in service so that they can see their worker when needed.

Pathway plans are of improved quality. Culturally sensitive direct work is undertaken, and interpreters are used when necessary. Pathway plans are timely and reviewed when required or at six-monthly intervals. Care leavers are directly involved in the development of their pathway plans which address their needs well. Plans demonstrate an increased understanding of care leavers' needs which inform appropriate referrals for additional support. Pathway plans are written for care leavers and capture their ambitions for the future across all areas of their lives. The consistent use of scaling means that care leavers' views are sought as to how well they are doing, and meaningful actions are developed to support them to the next stage of their lives. As a result, care leavers understand what support will be provided and how they will be helped.

Since the inspection in 2019, senior leaders have developed greatly improved partnerships resulting in enhanced accommodation options for care leavers. An increased number of organisations provide supported accommodation and the council's housing department assists care leavers to achieve their own accommodation. As a result, most care leavers are provided with suitable accommodation which includes the use of staying put. Unaccompanied asylum-

seeking care leavers are provided with accommodation with effective support from carers, targeted to meet their cultural needs. They also benefit from successful shared tenancies, where they are matched with care leavers from a similar heritage where appropriate.

Care leavers are provided with a generous enhanced offer of support, which includes frequent visits from other professionals. This provides them with help to develop their independence skills. Financial support to care leavers who attend university enables them to secure appropriate accommodation. Effective planning by workers for care leavers who are in custody means that they are provided with accommodation when they are released. Targeted youth support and specialist homelessness workers provide proactive and agile support to care leavers when they require additional support to prevent their tenancy from breaking down.

Care leavers and staff benefit from the recently commissioned, effective complex, emotional needs service. Significantly improved access to timely, flexible and individualised assessments delivers swift support to improving care leavers' mental health and emotional well-being. Leaving care workers report that the increased access to psychological support for staff extensively informs their practice. The earlier identification of care leavers' emerging health concerns is informed through the consistent completion of the adult well-being tool. This means that care leavers are provided with timely preventative interventions.

Since the last inspection, the local authority has focused heavily on participation and engagement with children, young people and care leavers. Leaders and members are committed to ensuring that care leavers, including those harder to reach, have an opportunity to make their views known. Increased feedback from care leavers is sought through a recently evolved and well-attended forum, through the regeneration champions, and through other groups. Consequently, senior leaders have an enhanced understanding of care leavers' experiences, and their voice is beginning to influence and inform service delivery.

There are more frequent opportunities to applaud the achievements of care leavers. Events take place to celebrate with them. Care leavers provide feedback that they feel extremely well supported by their leaving care workers. They benefit from an abundance of activities organised and facilitated by workers from 'Room 42', which provides them with an opportunity to meet other care leavers. Many of these events are attended by senior officers and elected members.

A stable and permanent senior leadership team is continuing to drive progress for care leavers. Corporate parenting has become everybody's business through ambitious local authority and political leadership. A shared culture of 'is this good enough for your child' has been established. Effective partnerships are leading to a genuine shared commitment to provide increased contributions to support care leavers as they make the transition to adulthood. The significant financial investment to increase both management and staff capacity in the leaving care service is

benefiting care leavers, as they are spending more meaningful time with their workers.

Performance management systems are greatly improved, and the development of a dashboard provides managers with a live tool through which they oversee and manage performance and care leavers' progress. The local authority's revised and much-improved self-assessment, together with improved care leaver performance data, show continued synergy which means that the local authority knows itself well.

Strategic accountability of performance data is driven through regular and well-attended corporate parenting board meetings. Elected members' challenge and scrutiny has driven purposeful performance management oversight by managers. The chief executive and lead member hold the leadership team to account for the quality of practice to care leavers. As a result of challenge from the lead member, a corporate parenting toolkit has been developed. An improved understanding from elected members about their role as corporate parents has contributed in the significant improvements to care leavers.

Recent adaptations to the improved audit tool for care leavers is giving leaders and members a greater understanding of the quality of the relationships between leaving care workers and care leavers. It also provides a more detailed and qualitative picture of the lives of care leavers and of the impact of the work done by their leaving care worker. Further adaptations are being made to reduce duplication and repetition and to consult with care leavers, which will further inform where practice can improve and enhance the process.

Staff and managers are well supported and valued by visible and approachable senior leaders. They experience consistent support, both emotionally and practically. Long-standing and committed workers describe significant improvements to the culture. They feel that their case loads are manageable, which means that they can spend meaningful time with care leavers.

The chosen model of practice is embedding in the work with care leavers. Leaving care workers feel more confident in its use and it is bringing consistency in their work with care leavers. Staff are positive about the training that is available to them. This learning is informing their interventions with care leavers and is improving the quality of their practice. Staff experience regular supervision, which offers reflection and provides them with clear direction.

Leaving care workers are positive about the progress the local authority is making to care leavers. They feel much more equipped in their work because of the improved resources available to them. Workers recognise the benefits to care leavers because of their engagement with senior leaders and members. They feel that the leaving care team is much more part of the wider service since the time of the last inspection. Leaving care workers are proud to work for Hull and feel supported by senior leaders to do the best that they can for care leavers.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Vicky Metheringham
Her Majesty's Inspector