

9 August 2022

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Dear Tony,

Focused visit to Enfield children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the focused visit to Enfield children's services on 5 and 6 July 2022. Her Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Andy Whippey, Kendra Bell and Nicki Shaw.

Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for care leavers.

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

Headline findings

A sustained focus on the part of senior managers, elected members and partners has resulted in tangible and sustained improvements for care leavers. Care leavers are well supported in Enfield by committed and caring personal advisers and social workers, who are ambitious for them and take a keen interest in their well-being. There is still more to do, but the quality of individual support and the various corporate initiatives have contributed to the overwhelming majority of care leavers in Enfield receiving levels of support that are consistent with their needs.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice?

- The review and updating of pathway plans when care leavers' needs change, or risks escalate, to accurately reflect current circumstances.

Main findings

Pathway plans for care leavers are needs-led, aspirational, up to date and focus on the actions that will support them most during their early years of adulthood. The voice of care leavers is consistently evident throughout their plans; their views, hopes and wishes are clearly captured. Pathway plans have a good focus on helping care leavers to develop the life skills that they will need to successfully negotiate the challenges and opportunities of the adult world. A small number of plans have not

been reviewed following significant changes to young people's circumstances, so that their current plans do not reflect their needs or the support that is being provided to them.

Care leavers live in a range of stable and safe accommodation which is well matched to their needs. Wherever possible, care leavers are supported to live close to their home neighbourhoods, and a high proportion either live within the borough or in an adjoining borough. The different levels of support care leavers need are well understood, including 'staying put', semi-independent living and independent living. A positive commitment to promoting staying put arrangements means that some young people are able to remain with their foster carers if this continues to meet their needs. Care leavers are helped by carers and key workers to develop the skills they need to live successfully on their own. They move into independence in a planned way and at a pace which is consistent with their needs.

Care leavers have access to tenancy support, and workers respond positively at times of crisis. This tenancy support has been important in helping some care leavers to maintain their tenancies and avoid homelessness. Risks which threaten the stability of care leavers' living arrangements are quickly identified and support is put in place.

Risks to care leavers are clearly identified and well understood, including risks from exploitation and domestic abuse. Risk assessments are routinely undertaken and workers are alert to signs that may indicate concerns for care leavers' well-being. In a small minority of risk assessments, the measures identified to reduce risk are insufficiently articulated.

Care leavers in custody are supported effectively. Their workers make sustained efforts to keep in contact, even when young people are not immediately receptive to such contact. Planning for each young person's release is timely, with good partner agency communication and provision that reflects their needs.

There is a strong focus on helping care leavers to access and enjoy employment, education and training opportunities (EET). Pathway plans have a clear focus on helping care leavers into EET. The work of the striving to achieve and aim higher panel (STAAH), and interventions provided by the EET coordinator, focus creatively on addressing any obstacles to care leavers engaging in EET activity. Work undertaken by the care leaver hub, with a range of targeted individual work and workshops devoted to EET activity and the development of life skills, has a positive impact on preparing care leavers for the opportunities and challenges of adulthood. Further developments are clearly underway to extend this offer when the service relocates later in the year.

The physical and emotional needs of care leavers are well met by a creative and innovative multi-agency team of professionals. The health, education, access and resource team 18+ service, which is a co-located team of health and social care professionals, provides a timely response to need and offers a flexible outreach

service to promote care leavers' access to health provision. Social workers benefit from consultations with health colleagues who offer advice and signpost to appropriate health services when necessary. All care leavers have access to their health histories when they reach 18.

Leaders have put in place a number of panels, such as the housing panel, risk panel and the STAAH panel, which together provide effective management oversight, shared risk management and clarity of direction when there are obstacles to achieving objectives in care leavers' pathway plans.

The care leaver hub provides an extensive range of drop-in services and workshops that support care leavers to develop independence skills, as well as opportunities to engage with specialist workers to discuss specific concerns associated with substance misuse or immigration matters. The hub is due to move to central Enfield, which will provide more opportunities for care leavers to access these services.

Care leavers who were previously unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and those still seeking asylum, receive an effective service. Staff and managers have a good understanding of the needs and risks for this cohort of children and young people. They recognise the importance of stability, and they rigorously pursue children's 'right to remain' status. There is an appropriate emphasis on education and training opportunities that enable care leavers to build solid foundations and have positive experiences. The local authority demonstrates a clear commitment to promoting equality and inclusion for all care leavers.

Staff visit care leavers, including those who have children of their own, at a frequency that is consistent with their level of need and risk, with patterns of contact increasing or decreasing as necessary. They are creative in maintaining contact with care leavers. Overall, care leavers are very well supported by their workers. Records of the vast majority of visits to care leavers are well written, showing clearly how workers have engaged positively with care leavers and with actions to be completed as a result of the visit. Visits are focused and have a clear purpose. Staff make tenacious efforts to stay in touch with young people. The emphasis on building and sustaining relationships with care leavers is a strength of the service. A high number of care leavers who are aged 18 and above, including some in their 20s, have remained with the same social workers since childhood. This continuity of support benefits care leavers as they enter adulthood.

Work with 21- to 24-year-old care leavers is sensitive to their views and proportionate to their current circumstances. Care leavers are informed of their rights and entitlements to services post-21, helping them to make informed decisions. When care leavers have not wanted a service at the time but have requested subsequent involvement when their circumstances have changed, such requests are responded to positively, with appropriate interventions.

Care leavers inspectors spoke to were positive about the service they have received. They described their workers as caring and supportive, without being overwhelming.

Staff have access to a wide range of training and development options. They report that they are very well supported by proactive, visible managers, who encourage them to engage in these opportunities. These events provide good opportunities for staff to reflect and focus on improvements in their practice with care leavers. Caseloads are manageable, enabling workers to undertake effective direct work with young people. Supervision is held regularly and, while there is some variability, most records are detailed and reflect the level of need and the care leavers' current circumstances.

As a corporate parent, the local authority shows ambition and determination to secure the best outcomes for care leavers. Leaders act to strengthen the multi-agency service offer available to them, for example increasing the number of apprenticeship opportunities. While the minutes of meetings reflect good consideration of a range of issues affecting the well-being of care leavers, they could evidence greater challenge to produce even better outcomes.

Performance management systems are effective and provide managers with relevant information in a timely manner which enables them to have oversight of key activities necessary to improve care leavers' well-being.

Senior managers have a good understanding of the service and are aware of any areas for further development. Case audits are embedded well in the service, giving managers a clear view of the quality of practice. These audits have been used to enhance the quality of work, such as the redesign of a form to record visits to care leavers. Managers understand that the impact the audit process has on practice would be strengthened through more conversations with care leavers about their experiences of the impact of work, and through meaningful reflective discussions with workers who support them.

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

Yours sincerely

Andy Whippey
Her Majesty's Inspector