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Vicky Schofield
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Dear Vicky Schofield,

Focused visit to Wakefield children's services

This letter summarises the findings of a focused visit to Wakefield children's services on 28 and 29 March 2023. His Majesty's inspectors for this visit were Nick Bennison and Rebecca Qusted.

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

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

Inspectors looked at a range of evidence, including case discussions with social workers, personal assistants and children and young people. They also looked at local authority performance management and quality assurance information and children's case records.

Overview

Care leavers are a priority for the local authority and services for care leavers have been identified as an area for improvement since the last inspection in 2021. Leaders have developed a culture and expectation that children should receive a quality service from all departments across the local authority. There is an ambition to further develop services to respond to young people's changing needs. This focus by leaders embeds the effective practice evidenced by the workforce and sustains a culture that is determined, ambitious and creative.

Practitioners are tenacious in establishing and building trusting relationships with care leavers. This ensures that children's needs and risks are understood. The needs of most care leavers are met by the local authority and risks effectively managed. Workers are very positive about their children and young people and take pride in the achievements made by them.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice

- Local offer to include internet access for young people.

Findings

Care leavers in Wakefield have workers who establish positive relationships with them. This leads to most children's needs being met and risks being well understood and managed. Workers put children and young people's needs first so that they can support them at important times in their lives. Children know that there are trusted adults in their lives who are available when they need them.

Children are helped as they approach adulthood with the early allocation of personal advisers. This allows relationships between the child and their worker to develop. They are listened to by their workers and their views inform their plans. Most children have pathway plans that identify both their needs and areas of risk. Workers ensure that actions from risk management plans are in children's pathway plans and are regularly reviewed. Regular multi-agency meetings mean that support is given quickly in response to young people's changing situation.

Children who have complex needs in Wakefield have a well-planned transition between children's services and adult services. This minimises disruption for this vulnerable group. Equally the vulnerabilities created by their complex needs are well managed. There is appropriate use of deprivation of liberty orders to reduce risk and ensure that courts have proper oversight of the local authority's arrangements for the child.

There is a wide range of accommodation available to meet the needs of care leavers as they progress to adulthood. Care leavers are aided by the local authority as they move into their own tenancy. Strong and effective partnership working with housing allows for timely identification of suitable properties and early support if tenancies are at risk. This is leading to greater stability for care leavers living in their own home.

Care leavers are assisted in accessing education and employment by the local authority. There are strong links between the Next Steps team and educational provision in Wakefield. This means that children receive early support to retain them in education.

Most care leavers in the local authority understand the local offer. The offer gives children and young people a wide range of benefits. However, the local offer could

be further strengthened by consistently supporting young people to access the internet in their own property.

The Emotional Well-Being Team meets care leavers' emotional and mental health care needs. When children's mental health places them at significant risk, the local authority is quick to organise multi-agency packages of support.

When children are missing, most receive a timely return home interview from a worker with whom they have had consistent contact. This allows them to develop trusting relationships with workers and allows the local authority to have a greater understanding of risks around the child. The local authority is quick to create multi-agency plans. However, for a small number of children, they are not robust enough to prevent further harm.

For care leavers who are a risk to other children, the local authority has a clear understanding of those risks and has a timely, multi-agency approach to managing them. The plans for a small number of care leavers could have been strengthened by specifying who would carry out action and within what timescale.

Care leavers who are parents are nurtured by the local authority. Their personal assistants organise well-coordinated packages of support. The local authority has established a toddler group for care leavers who are parents. This allows young people to gain advice from both professionals and their own peer group.

Most care leavers who are in custody are supported by the local authority. Workers regularly visit them, and their pathway plans are updated to reflect their changed circumstances. This work would be strengthened by a greater involvement of the family network in local authority planning.

There are strong governance arrangements involving elected members and partners at senior levels. Leaders have focused on developing services for care leavers through the strengthening of partnership relationships both within the local authority and externally. They have invited external scrutiny to identify areas for development within the service. This has led to progress in the service for care leavers. They also have a clear vision to further develop the quality of service for care leavers in Wakefield.

Senior leaders know the care leaver cohort and understand their needs. There is comprehensive performance information and audit programmes, which aids leaders to focus on areas for development. The audit process will be enhanced if it is undertaken with practitioners and feedback is gained from children and their families. Senior leaders are in regular contact with workers, and this supports their understanding of work pressures and service quality.

Workers have manageable caseloads. This enables them to support care leavers effectively. They have a wide training offer which supports them in their roles. Workers receive regular, reflective supervision from their manager which results in

clearly recorded actions that are both time-bound and reviewed. This ensures that plans for most care experienced children and young people are progressed.

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

Yours sincerely

Nick Bennison
His Majesty's Inspector