

27 February 2024

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30-40 High Street  
Scunthorpe

Dear Ms Smith

### **Focused visit to North Lincolnshire children's services**

This letter summarises the findings of the focused visit to North Lincolnshire children's services on 23 and 24 January 2024. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Catherine Heron and Louise Walker.

Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for care leavers aged 18 to 25, in particular, the quality and suitability of accommodation, support into adulthood and care leavers with specific needs.

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 in young people's case records, including pathway plans and case supervision records. Inspectors met with and spoke to care leavers and held case discussions with personal advisers and managers. Inspectors also looked at the organisation's performance management and quality assurance information.

### **Headline findings**

Care leavers in North Lincolnshire receive comprehensive and timely support, which helps them to make progress in their lives. They benefit from suitable and stable accommodation and a range of creative interventions that meet their needs, reduce risks and help them to achieve. Care leavers have meaningful and trusted relationships with their workers, which endure into adulthood. Senior leaders and personal advisers embrace their corporate parenting role and go the extra mile for care leavers, constantly developing services that enhance young people's experiences and result in positive outcomes.

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

- The frequency and recording of personal advisers' supervision, particularly when they joint work young people's cases.

- The recording of management oversight and decision-making in young people's records.

## **Main findings**

The quality of young people's relationships with their personal advisers is a real strength in North Lincolnshire. Workers are allocated early, when young people are in care, which helps their relationships to develop. The vast majority of care leavers told inspectors that personal advisers make a positive difference to their lives. One care leaver described their adviser as, 'On point. They get things done. They meet my needs and are good at recognising when I need help.'

Personal advisers are highly committed to their care leavers. They go the extra mile in providing young people with high levels of emotional and practical support, demonstrating thoughtful and compassionate practice. This helps young people to develop enduring and trusting relationships with their personal advisers and have confidence that they can rely on them whenever needed.

Care leavers receive timely access to emotional well-being and mental health services. When there are signs of young people's mental health deteriorating, personal advisers take effective action through supportive discussions with young people and providing help to attend medical appointments. These services are provided at a pace that is right for the young person and according to their wishes.

The majority of care leavers understand their rights and entitlements. The local offer is comprehensive, updated in response to local and national changes and provides a lifelong offer of support. The enhanced support provided through the lifelong offer means that care leavers can access the service at any age. This support is based solely on the care leavers wishes and needs, for example a quick telephone call to see how they are doing, meeting to celebrate a birthday or transport for an important appointment.

Increased risks to care leavers are quickly recognised by personal advisers and monitored closely by their managers. Personal advisers are responsive; they visit young people often, regularly review pathway plans and provide intervention that increases care leavers' safety.

Pathway plans are detailed and personalised and created with young people's participation and views. Although written plans vary in their quality, all plans include the young person's aspirations, needs and actions to help the young person meet their goals. Pathway plans are reviewed on a regular basis and when there are significant changes in young people's lives. This means that personal advisers have clear plans to follow when supporting young people to make progress.

Most written records in young people's case files are detailed, purposeful and sensitively written. They help the reader understand what is happening at a

particular moment in the young person's life and the unique interactions between them and their worker. They capture the young person's personality and quotes from what they have said. This means that should young people choose to access their records at a later date, these records would enable them to have a good understanding of their lives. In a small number of records, although workers could describe the work completed with the young person, the records did not reflect the level of intervention and the difference it had made to the young person.

The vast majority of young people live in accommodation which is suitable and meets their needs. Most young people told inspectors that they feel safe in their home, and when this is not the case, they are supported effectively by their personal adviser and other agencies to find another home.

Care leavers receive help to learn skills that promote independent living. Life skills officers provide young people with needs-led, timely support to manage a tenancy, for example in maintaining safe and suitable home conditions and ways to be a good neighbour. The partnership arrangements between children's social care and housing ensure that the most vulnerable young people receive additional targeted support aimed at addressing housing-related issues and reducing the risk of eviction. This intervention supports care leavers to have stable and secure homes and develop meaningful skills for adulthood.

North Lincolnshire's one family approach features strongly in work with care leavers who are parents or parents to be. Practitioners across the service work in partnership to help young parents, empowering them to meet their children's needs. Support is offered at different stages of parenthood and helps alleviate worries care leavers have about parenting. Care leavers who are parents told inspectors that their personal advisers have faith in them, and this motivates them to make good decisions for their children and to be the best parents that they can be.

Young people and their children benefit from the recently launched grandparent offer. This offer provides a range of additional help, such as financial contributions to enjoy a family activity or occasional childcare. One parent said, 'It's like having an aunty who looks after the kids to give me a break.' This strengthens young people's support system and promotes positive parenting.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people receive sensitive support from personal advisers who skilfully adapt their approach and intervention to meet the young people's needs. Accommodation is carefully allocated and based on the young person's preferences and their community links. Young people are supported to obtain the necessary legal status and attend appointments. Personal advisers demonstrated a clear understanding of the emotional needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people and the traumatic impact that earlier life experiences may have had on them. Personal advisers ensure that the young people are regularly offered therapeutic support and helped to access this at a pace that is right for them.

There are very small numbers of care leavers in custody, and they have regular contact with their personal adviser, including face-to-face appointments. Personal advisers are consistent and show tenacity in developing meaningful relationships that later prove incredibly valuable when young people leave custody. Effective joint working and partnership arrangements between agencies ensure that young people's custody release plans consider their holistic needs and the help they need to reintegrate successfully into their community.

Some care leavers proudly told inspectors about their progress and reflected on how far they feel they have come in successfully managing their own tenancy and living independently with support from their workers. Care leavers also shared insightful ideas on how to help younger children in care with the transition into independent living. Leaders demonstrated that they have developed plans to further enhance this area of practice. Leaders are committed to consulting with care leavers again on this issue to ensure care leavers' expertise further shapes services.

Council leaders are extremely committed corporate parents and focused on providing the highest quality services to care leavers. The council leader's and the lead member's long service mean that they have experience and knowledge of children's services. This enables them to challenge senior leaders effectively and hold them to account.

There have been significant recent changes in the senior leadership team, but this has not impacted the quality of services to care leavers seen at this visit. Although most of the leaders are new to their roles, they have significant long service in North Lincolnshire Council. This means that they have a clear understanding of the service and the key priorities. They know their workforce and, most importantly, their care leavers well. The workforce says that they feel unaffected by the leadership changes and that the working culture remains positive with a sustained focus on care leavers well-being and progress.

Leaders use the effective audit system to monitor practice and learn from care leavers' experiences. The collaborative audit approach, involving practitioners and care leavers, means that their respective views are central to practice improvement and service design. Leaders think creatively and apply learning from audits to wider service developments.

Overall, managers in the care leavers' service have a good grip on practice and understand the individual young people's circumstances. However, this is not consistently well evidenced in young people's written records. This means that records do not always demonstrate management oversight and decisions made for young people.

Some personal advisers do not receive formal case supervision for young people that they work with, particularly where they are joint working the care leaver's case with

another practitioner. This shortfall was brought to leaders' attention by inspectors during the visit, and leaders took immediate and effective action to address this.

Personal advisers have manageable workloads, and this has improved following an increase in the number of workers in the team. This means that personal advisers have more time to spend with young people, developing meaningful relationships and supporting them to meet their needs.

Personal advisers describe managers and senior leaders as visible and approachable. They say that they enjoy working in the North Lincolnshire care leaver service. One worker said, 'It feels like a big family; we all bring something to our work with young people and we share the learning.' Workers value the training offer, which helps them improve their skills and understanding of issues affecting care leavers. This has contributed to the high retention rate of workers in North Lincolnshire.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Heron  
His Majesty's Inspector