

17 October 2024

Lisa Arthey  
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Dear Lisa

### **Monitoring visit to Swindon Borough Council children's services**

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Swindon Borough Council children's services on 17 and 18 September 2024. This was the third monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in July 2024. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Nick Bennison and Jo Warburton.

### **Areas covered by the visit**

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

- Services to care-experienced young people aged 18 to 25.
- Services to separated migrant children aged 18 to 25.

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

### **Headline findings**

The actions taken by leaders are beginning to focus the council and their partners on the needs of care-experienced young people in Swindon. This change is recognised by workers and young people and is beginning to positively impact on services to care-experienced young people. They are supported well by committed local authority workers. This support could be improved by pathway plans that reflect young people's changing needs and involve the whole of their support network. Equally, workers would be better supported with regular and positively challenging management oversight of their work.

### **Findings and evaluation of progress**

The workforce in Swindon is now more stable. The senior management team is permanent and the majority of workers are now permanent. Investment by the council into the leaving care service has seen increased capacity through the creation of an extra assistant Team Manager and an extra Personal Assistant post. This

investment is beginning to lead to a reduction in the number of changes in workers experienced by young people in this service area.

Senior managers continue to be visible to the workforce. Workers report that the regular staff briefings are helpful in gaining information and for them to provide feedback to leaders. The senior leadership team responded by ensuring that the current rate of change is not overwhelming for staff.

Care-experienced young people report being listened to and being involved in decisions that influence and shape services for them. They view this as a significant cultural change. They value becoming more visible and involved with political and corporate leaders, and they appreciate the efforts that the council is now making to celebrate their success and achievements.

The corporate partnership is becoming more effective in creating greater strategic joint working across the council. This is particularly striking in the partnership working between children services and housing. Equally, the children's commissioning team is beginning to understand gaps in service provision and are developing services to meet these needs. This is leading to a greater accommodation choice for young people. There is a need for greater engagement from partners with the corporate parenting agenda, particularly the Integrated Care Board. The current mental health service is not meeting the needs of care-experienced young people with mental health needs. The pace of change in this service is too slow, leaving some young people in considerable distress.

There has been improvement in the performance information gained from the Care Director system that managers use to help them understand the quality of their services. However, the data created is still too reliant on some manual counting. This reduces the reliability of the information and makes it more difficult to track the services to young people. Leaders know this and have commissioned a service to increase the reliability and quality of data.

The quality assurance process enables leaders to understand areas of strength and development within their Leaving Care services. The involvement of workers in the audit process adds to their learning. The moderation of audits adds depth in leaders' understanding of the quality of services being received by young people.

There is regular management oversight of the work carried out in the Positive Futures service. Workers are well supported by their manager. However, this oversight lacks focus on and challenge to the quality of service that young people are

receiving from their worker. Workers receive a wide range of training that supports them in their role.

Young people have workers who are imaginative and persistent, which results in positive relationships with them. As a result, they know young people well and the important people in their lives.

The physical health needs of young people are proactively supported by personal advisers (PAs). Equally most young people have their emotional health and well-being supported through early identification and provision of services. However, those care-experienced young people with mental health needs are having to wait too long before they receive the right health support.

Young people are involved in their pathway plans. However, plans do not involve either their family or professional support network. This means that plans do not identify or coordinate all areas of support for the young person. The plans do not reflect significant changes in young people's lives. Most plans have actions that lack focus and are too general. This means that for young people, support planning is not wholly effective and not responsive to their changing circumstances.

Care-experienced young people are supported in accessing their local offer entitlements. The local authority has worked hard at improving the accessibility of the offer to young people. The Local Offer could be strengthened by outlining the support care-experienced young people are entitled to, to access broadband. Not all young people are able to access exemption from council tax, which is their entitlement. This means that the offer is not equitable for young people who live out of area or are over 21 years old.

The Local Authority is increasingly offering a more focused and coordinated service for young people not in education or employment. This is beginning to make an impact, but leaders recognise that there is more to do. Care-experienced young people at university are well supported both financially and practically, with PAs maintaining regular contact with both the young person and the university. They are also provided with consistent accommodation during university holidays.

For care-experienced young people who are parents, there is a variability in the quality of support provided to them. Some experience the impact of strong, multi-agency plans that practically and emotionally support the young person. Others receive sole support from the PA. This is a missed opportunity to create a stronger family and professional network of support for the young person.

When care-experienced young people are at risk of exploitation, PAs respond quickly. They liaise with relevant professionals and support plans to mitigate risk.

Care-experienced young people in custody are well supported by their PAs. They receive regular visits and there is joined up planning between workers and other

agencies, particularly probation. This ensures that appropriate services are in place on their release.

Young people with a disability have PAs who take time to understand the young person, their needs and circumstances. There are also early referrals to the adult transitions team, which means that Care Act assessments can be completed. This ensures that there is strong, joined-up planning between children's and adults' services that meets these young people's needs as they transition to adulthood.

When care-experienced young people reach 21, they are encouraged to continue to access support from Positive Futures by their PA. The support offered is proactive and aids young people as they move to adulthood. When young people have decided not to keep in touch at 21, the local authority does not have a robust system in place to ensure that young people remain aware of the support that they can access.

Young people who are separated migrant children are cared for in placements that meet their cultural, religious and support needs. They receive effective help from the local authority to formalise their legal status in the United Kingdom and in retaining contact with their families. They are well supported by PAs in accessing and maintaining educational and employment placements.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Nick Bennison  
His Majesty's Inspector