

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
Textphone 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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John Gregg
Peterborough
Sand Martin House
Bittern Way
Fletton Quays
Peterborough
PE2 8TY

Dear John

Monitoring visit of Peterborough children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Peterborough children's services on 28 October 2025. The visit was the fifth monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in January 2024. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Nicki Shaw and Parveen Hussain.

Areas covered by the visit

During this visit, inspectors reviewed the care leaving service and workforce development. Inspectors had a particular focus on:

- Pathway planning.
- Care leavers in custody.
- Care leavers who are not in education, employment or training.

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

Headline findings

Leaders in Peterborough remain strong, committed and highly ambitious for care leavers. The cabinet member for children services and the newly appointed leader of the council are committed to strengthening partnership working to ensure that services for young people improve their experiences. The enhanced local offer illustrates leaders' aspirations and ambition for care leavers; it is clear, accessible and shaped by young people. The innovative House Project is now fully operational, and this is providing targeted support for care leavers to develop independent living skills and confidence.

Leaders have developed the infrastructure around leaving care, but there remain workforce challenges because of staff and management turnover in the service. Consequently, personal advisers' (PA) caseloads have increased. This increase has had a negative impact on PAs' capacity to develop meaningful relationships and complete timely pathway plans reviews. This limits opportunities to promote the local offer and ensure that care leavers are receiving all their entitlements. Supervision and management oversight do not consistently support PAs to address this. PAs report that they can feel overworked and overwhelmed. Leaders recognise this is not a sustainable position and have dedicated corporate support to assist with recruitment.

Findings and evaluation of progress

The inspirational and talented young people representing Peterborough Care Leaders told inspectors that they actively engage in participation opportunities, which enable them to influence and shape service design and delivery. This includes creating an insightful 'every word matters' glossary to ensure that professionals supporting young people only use language that works for children and young people. Peterborough Care Leaders successfully secured funding to create an 11-week activity and skills programme for care leavers to reduce social isolation, learn new skills and develop confidence.

Care leavers are supported by PAs who are ambitious for them. PAs demonstrate warmth, interest and concern in care leavers' progress and well-being. They are enthusiastic, persistent and resolute in supporting care leavers to achieve their potential.

Most PAs have a well-developed understanding of care leavers' individual needs and circumstances. Their relationships are characterised by meaningful and empathetic conversations that encourage young people to express their concerns openly. Care leavers in custody are visited by their PA; however, these visits are not always in line with agreed timescales, which means that care leavers do not always get the support they need.

The health and well-being of care leavers are a priority, and PAs support them to access help and support, including enabling young people to attend appointments to ensure that their emotional and mental health needs are met. Care leavers are supported to live in safe accommodation and signposted to numerous services to support them, such as smoking cessation and counselling. Care leavers are registered with a GP, dentist and optician.

Care leavers have access to the revised and improved local offer, and most understand their entitlements and are supported to access these. Young people told inspectors that the offer is much better. However, PAs are not clear about what care leavers in custody are entitled to when they are released from custody. Some aspects of the local offer, such as council tax exemption and free gym membership,

are only available for care leavers living in Peterborough. This disadvantages care leavers living outside of Peterborough.

Capacity in the leaving care service impacts on PAs' ability to complete timely reviews of care leavers' pathway plans. More recent pathway plans are co-produced with young people and are comprehensive, illustrating their needs and ambitions with clear actions to support them to achieve their goals. For disabled young people, pathway plans capture their needs and daily routines to inform their plans.

For some young people in custody, their pathway plans are not sufficiently ambitious and contain only basic information. Management oversight is not driving or influencing these plans.

Most care leavers are not allocated a PA until just before their 18th birthdays. This does not always give them sufficient time to build relationships and get to know their PA before their transition to the leaving care service.

Young people turning 18 have the option of receiving ongoing involvement from their independent reviewing officer. This provides additional oversight and continued support for young people, mitigating the challenges created by the turnover of staff in the leaving care service. However, this oversight is not always driving improvement.

PAs understand the risks and vulnerabilities associated with exploitation and support care leavers to develop healthy relationships and keep themselves safe. PAs attend Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements meetings to update the professional network when a care leaver is in custody. This action ensures that all relevant information, such as the potential risks they pose to themselves and others, is fully considered to inform plans before they are released from custody. When care leavers in custody are being considered for deportation, PAs ensure that they have access to legal advice so young people can fully understand the appeals process.

Care leavers are supported by PAs who are ambitious about their future and inspire them to achieve. When young people are not in education, employment or training, there is advice and support available. This is reflected in their pathway plans, identifying alternative ways for care leavers to develop confidence and work readiness, for example by gaining meaningful voluntary work.

The virtual school actively supports young people who are not in education, employment or training. The improved and extended remit of the virtual school means support is now available for young people up to the age of 25. There has been significant improvement with more care leavers being supported to go to university.

The council's ambitious family business model is influencing a city-wide approach to employment opportunities for young people. This is starting to have an impact, with four young people accessing apprenticeships within the council. Job fairs have been introduced to mobilise support from local businesses, with the intention of

generating work experience, mentoring and paid employment opportunities for young people. All vacancies in the council are reviewed to consider whether these can be ring-fenced for care leavers. Leaders have introduced the Cambridge Community Foundation Enrichment and Aspiration Fund. This provides opportunities for young people to secure funding for a range of enriching activities to develop confidence and new skills.

Care leavers live in suitable accommodation, and the innovative House Project provides targeted support for young people to develop independent living skills and confidence in preparation for securing their own housing tenancy. This includes transitional support from practitioners in the House Project helping care leavers when they move into their own property. This ensures that young people do not feel isolated.

Pathway plans would benefit from greater multi-agency involvement at both the planning and the review stage. This would also benefit contingency planning, which is considered in most plans but is not always meaningful.

Supervision and management oversight do not consistently provide opportunities for PAs to reflect on their interventions with care leavers and do not encourage professional curiosity. PAs are not provided with direction, and actions are not sufficiently clear to influence the quality of practice or improve care leavers' experiences.

There have been significant improvements in workforce development since the last inspection. PAs have access to a new development programme aimed at enhancing their skills to support young people leaving care. Managers and leaders have access to targeted leadership and management training. The learning and development offer is comprehensive and aligned to the preferred practice model. A range of routes into social work have been developed as well as a 'grow your own' programme through an apprenticeship offer.

A new children's services induction programme has been introduced to complement the corporate offer. This is intended to support staff to gain clarity on service structure and local context. PAs report that they would benefit from a bespoke induction programme in the leaving care service to enhance their knowledge about policy, procedures and processes for care leavers.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Nicki Shaw
His Majesty's Inspector