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11 March 2014

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) - Councillor Duggins

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Executive Director, People

**Ward(s) affected:**

All

**Title:** Progress Report on Route 21 Care Leavers' Service

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**Is this a key decision?**

No

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**Executive Summary:**

The Council has a legal duty to provide support and advice to young people aged 16 and over who are living in or have left the care of the local authority, preparing them for independent living and to have arrangements in place to support effective planning so their transition into adulthood is positive.

The Local Authority de-commissioned the Shaftesbury Young People Personal Advisor Service in March 2013. The service transferred under the Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment regulations (TUPE) in April 2013, leading to the new Route 21 Care Leavers' Service which brings together the former 15+ Social Work Team and Shaftesbury Young People Personal Advisor Service.

This enabled the Council to move forward with an integrated service for care leavers which is more efficient and effective in fulfilling the Council's responsibilities as a corporate parent, providing a consistent level of care and support, and improving outcomes for care leavers. This report provides an update on progress to the Cabinet Member (Children and Young People).

**Recommendations:**

The Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) is requested to note the progress made to date and endorse next steps regarding future development of the service (as outlined in paragraphs 7.1 and 7.2).

**List of Appendices included**

None

**Other useful background papers**

None

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

Yes

Education and Children Services Scrutiny Board (2): 7 November 2013

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

No

**Will this report go to Council?**

No

## Report title: Progress Report on Route 21 Care Leavers' Service

### 1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 The Council has a legal duty to provide support and advice to young people aged 16 and over who are living in, or have left the care of the local authority, preparing them for independent living and to have arrangements in place to support effective planning so their transition into adulthood is positive.
- 1.2 The functions including powers and duties of local authorities in relation to children leaving care and care leavers are set out in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000; Children Acts 1989 and 2004; Children and Young Persons' Act 2008 and the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 (the Care Leavers Regulations).
- 1.3 The underpinning principles are to enable care leavers to achieve their potential as young adults, maintain education, employment and training. Legislation includes a specific duty for the provision of Personal Advisors to advise, assist and befriend care leavers.
- 1.4 The legislation identifies four distinct status positions for young people who are leaving or have left Council care:
  - **Eligible** – Young people aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who are still looked after.
  - **Relevant** - Young people aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who have left care. This also includes young people who were detained (e.g. in a youth offending institution) or hospital when they turned 16 but immediately before that were looked after.
  - **Former relevant** – Young people between 18 and 21 who were previously 'eligible' or 'relevant'. Local authorities support this group at least until the age of 21 or longer if in education or training.
  - **Qualifying** - Young people under 21 (or 24 if in education or training) who cease to be looked after or accommodated in a variety of other settings, or privately fostered, after the age of 16. This also includes young people who are under a Special Guardianship order.
- 1.5 The Council has differing duties and powers in relation to each of the above. However, all are entitled to expert advice and assessments of need and support.
- 1.6 The Council aims to ensure that all care leavers receive inclusive, high quality support and will continue to prioritise support, especially for those care leavers with complex needs, which make them vulnerable to becoming not in education, training or employment (NEET).
- 1.7 Coventry has signed up to the Care Leavers' Charter and its principles are at the core of the work of Route 21 and are designed to raise expectations, aspirations and understanding of what care leavers need and what the government and local authorities should do to be good Corporate Parents.

### 2. Route 21 Care Leavers' Service

- 2.1 The Local Authority de-commissioned the Shaftsbury Young People Personal Advisor Service in March 2013. The service transferred under the Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment regulations in April 2013 leading to the new Route 21 Care

Leavers' Service which brought together the former 15+ Social Work Team and Shaftsbury Young People Personal Adviser Service.

- 2.2 This enabled the Council to move forward with an integrated service for care leavers and provide Social Workers with responsibility for all 'Eligible' young people, and Personal Adviser resources to meet the requirements to support all 'relevant', 'former relevant' and 'qualifying' young people.
- 2.3 Route 21 is a more efficient and effective way of fulfilling the Council's responsibilities to care leavers as a Corporate Parent, providing a consistent level of care and support, and improving outcomes for care leavers as follows:
- Improves the young person's experience by providing greater coherence in respect of case transfer points and transitions
  - Gives greater flexibility with a single point of access for all care leavers
  - Aligns strategic decision-making around local policy and service delivery
  - Provides robust quality assurance on services for care leavers
  - Improves operational effectiveness and efficiencies by rationalising resources and reducing duplication.
- 2.4 An additional key part of the move to an integrated service was the need to identify a cost effective solution that enabled the Council to meet its full statutory responsibilities to care leavers, and achieve the targeted annual saving of £150K, plus the potential for an additional £55K of annual savings.
- 2.5 Following a period of formal staff and trade union consultation on the proposed changes during October and November 2013, the new structure was implemented in December 2013. The impact of the consultation led to minor changes to the proposed structure and resulted in an increase in the number of Personal Advisors and strengthened management oversight.

Agreed structure			Proposed structure		
Post	Grade	FTE	Post	Grade	FTE
Service Manager	10	1	Service Manager	10	1
Team Manager	G9	2	Team Manager	G9	1
Senior Practitioner	G8	0	Senior Practitioner	G8	2
Social Workers	G6/7	5.6	Social Workers	G6/7	6
Personal Adviser	G5	10.5	Personal Adviser	G5	9.5
Admin / Finance support	G2/G3	2	Admin / Finance support	G3	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>21.1</b>			<b>21.5</b>

- 2.6 The impact of these changes led to a number of vacancies in the service, including the Service Manager, 5 Personal Advisors (3 leaving to undertake Social Work Training, 2 on maternity leave) and 1.6 Social Workers. This was anticipated and recruitment to those posts was expedited. The Service Manager was appointed and commenced in January 2014, all Personal Advisors have been appointed and the recruitment for Social Workers is underway.

### **3. Service Capacity and Demand**

- 3.1 Based on current projections it is anticipated that the service will work with 360 young people and in addition a further 150 young people who are Qualifiers.
- 3.2 Over the next three months, a number of young people will be transferring to the service and the transfers are being managed on a case by case basis to minimise the changes of Social Workers.
- 3.3 Social Worker caseloads are currently operating at up to 20 per full-time equivalent and 25 for Personal Advisors. These caseloads are kept under review by managers through supervision and performance information.
- 3.4 The number of young people across the key categories at present are as follows:

Eligible	103
Relevant	23
Former Relevant	221
Qualifiers	42
Total	389

### **4. Pathway planning**

- 4.1 Young people in Care should have a Pathway Plan within 3 months of their 16th birthday or after becoming entitled to a leaving care service post 16 years of age, which should be reviewed every 6 months. The Pathway Plan is the responsibility of a Social Worker to implement and maintain up to the age of 18 with Personal Advisors participating in any review.
- 4.2 In March 2013, 90% of young people who had left care had a Pathway Plan report within the required 6 month timeframe.
- 4.3 In January 2014, 86% of young people who had left care had a Pathway Plan report within the required 6 month period. This reduction in performance is due to the transition period and once all vacancies have been recruited and the service is fully established, completion rates will improve.
- 4.4 Whilst we have seen improvement in the quality of Pathway Plans, there is still work to be undertaken on ensuring that young people participate in the drawing up and implementing of their plan, and that partner agencies are involved in the process.

### **5. Support advice and guidance on apprenticeships and further/higher education**

- 5.5 Across the care leaver population there is a spectrum of skills and abilities. The service works with those who have not been in full-time education for a number of years as well as those studying at a higher level. It needs to be recognised that many young people have interrupted education, often leaving them with poor ambition and low self-esteem. It is a challenge that requires much investment of time, practical and emotional support to enable a young person to believe they are capable of success, to identify an appropriate route for them and for them to maintain their studies whilst often taking sole responsibility for running their own home.

- 5.6 The Young Person's Personal Education Plan and Care Plan should over the course of their education develop their career aspirations and ambitions and the pathway planning process should focus on enabling the young person to move into further education and/or employment.
- 5.7 A Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Partnership Worker is based within the service to ensure that the support and advice is available to Young People as well as staff. The service works closely with the Looked after Children Education Service to support young people to access a range of courses locally through colleges and other providers. The service has also established links with the Corporate Employment Team who regularly hold recruitment sessions with young people. Other providers encouraging softer employability skills, such as Warwickshire Association of Youth Clubs and Herbert Art Gallery media team also run courses and young people are assisted to engage in these.
- 5.8 The service currently has 15 young people in Higher Education. It has developed good relationships with local universities and the further education colleges. There is a range of support available to care leavers who are in further or higher education and this may vary depending on individual circumstances. Support can include financial support for course and examination fees, course equipment and books; clothing or uniform needed to do the course or job, vacation accommodation.

## **6. Ensuring Care Leavers Receive Accurate Benefit Advice**

- 6.1 Special benefit rules apply to care leavers. In general, local authorities are responsible for supporting young people in and from care up to the age of 18 by paying for accommodation and living costs. The only 16 and 17 year olds leaving care that may be able to claim benefits are young parents and disabled young people. Post 18 the local authority may still give care leaver's further financial support, but they are not expected to be their main source of income. Like all young people they would get their income from work, education grants and, if eligible for benefits, they are supported to claim these.
- 6.2 Benefits advice is a very specialist area and constant changes provide challenges to those working with care leavers. In October 2013, Jobcentre Plus introduced a marker to identify care leavers on their Labour Market System which will ensure care leavers get the best support available. The Service has established quarterly meetings with the local Jobcentre Plus service in November 2013 to ensure that there is regular exchange of information and minimal delays in care leavers receiving entitled benefits on their 18th birthday.
- 6.3 Care leavers are also entitled to other financial support such as Setting up Home Allowance (previously known as Leaving Care Allowance). The financial support available to care leavers is currently identified through the 'Money Matters' document. This is not meant to be exhaustive and cannot cover all areas of need. Financial requests are assessed on the basis of identified need. This is currently under review in the light of the consultation with Voices of Care and the Government's Care Leavers' Strategy published in the autumn.

## **7. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 7.1 There have been some strong improvements in the delivery of service to care leavers over the last eighteen months. There is clear ambition to build on the success that has been achieved so far and to integrate the Social Work and Personal Advisor functions which will see pathway planning being more effectively implemented across Children's Services.

7.2 The key priorities for the service over the next 6 months are to:

- Recruit to vacancies
- Develop and establish an integrated culture within the service
- Review and update a number of key policies which informs practice and service delivery
  - Development of systematic approach to preparation for independence
  - Leaving Care Finance Policy
  - Leaving Care Policy
- Embed a process to ensure that young people leaving care are provided with information regarding their health through provision of the health passports
- Improve the quality, consistency and timeliness of Pathway Plans to ensure that these are targeted to improve outcomes for care leavers
- Improve and strengthen engagement of partner agencies

## **8. Results of consultation undertaken**

8.1 A service level consultation including key stakeholders took place in 2012 to inform the 'Future Care Leaver Service Strategy'. In 2012, a further care leaver consultation was undertaken in which 37 young people took part representing 13% of those receiving services through the previous Personal Advisor Service. Both these informed the development of the service.

8.2 The Service promotes a strong ethos of the involvement of young people in decisions and planning for their future. The Service has also involved young people in service development such as policy development, the recruitment of staff, and other areas of practice.

## **9. Timetable for implementing this decision**

9.1 The service will be reviewed in 12 months to evaluate its performance and service delivery.

## **10. Comments from Executive Director, Resources**

Financial implications:

The 2013/14 budget for the new Route 21 Care Leavers' Service was set at £763,000, enabling an annual saving of £150,000. On top of this, it is expected that an additional £55,000 saving will be achieved in 2014/15 as part of the procurement savings target

There is a separate budget for financial support for care leavers - for 2013/14, this is £336,000. We are in the process of reviewing the policy, and this support will be reviewed and updated in the next 6 months

## **11. Legal implications**

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 places requirements on local authorities to plan for looked after children so they have the support they need as they make the transition to adulthood. Legislation and statutory guidance dictates how support must be provided.

## **12. Other implications**

### **12.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard/organisational blueprint/Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?**

The Council is committed to helping care leavers to successfully live independently in its role as Corporate Parent. By bringing services together into one single structure, the Council seeks to improve the life chances of all vulnerable young people, through an integrated approach and ensuring that children and young people are safe, achieve and make a positive contribution.

### **12.2 How is risk being managed?**

Considerable efforts have been made through consultation between the Council and its key stakeholders to manage the key risks to this service moving forward. The new service model incorporates new features which will minimise and mitigate key risks that have been identified, and ensure an improved care leaver service from 2013-2014 and beyond.

### **12.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

There was a direct impact on the Council of those employees of the outsourced Personal Advisor Service who transferred under TUPE. A total of 17 staff transferred.

### **12.4 Equalities/EIA**

An Equality and Consultation Analysis was undertaken in 2012 with key stakeholders and young people which identified equality impacts.

The Equality and Consultation Analysis recognised that a number of young people with significant disability and health problems will not benefit from the services proposed under the new Route 21 service and for these young people the disability led planning and assessment process through the Children's Disability Team is better suited to meet their needs. However it recognised they will continue to be entitled to a Personal Advisor and the service will be training staff to better meet the needs of these young people.

An Equality and Consultation Analysis 'Supported Accommodation & Floating Support Services for Vulnerable Young People was also completed in 2012 and has informed the Supported Accommodation model which ensures a more diverse range of accommodation to meet young people's individual needs including care leavers.

It is also recognised that there is an increasing number of care leavers over the age of 21 that are returning to Education, who will be entitled to support from the care leaver service.

### **12.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment**

None.



## 12.6 Implications for partner organisations?

The service works extensively across key partner agencies to support the interests of care leavers and ensure a coherent multi agency approach. On-going consultation with partners will be required to ensure services are focused on meeting the Council's continuing statutory duties and priorities towards these young people.

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