

Overview and Scrutiny Panel Recommendations Report

REVIEW TITLE	O&S PANEL	DATE
Care Leavers Review	Education, Skills and Growth	22 January 2020

“We recognise our responsibility as corporate parents and the need to ensure there is sufficient support in terms of housing, education, jobs and accommodation for care leavers.”

Cllr Mrs Birch, Chair: Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel



Recommendations

- 1. Review the Housing Allocation Policy 2015 to include consideration of priority being awarded to care leavers where the authority has a Corporate Parenting role, particularly those who opt to ‘stay put’ with their foster family. (To be reviewed by 01/02/2021)**
- 2. Review life skills and money management information to ensure consistency of provision; information available on the Local Offer Care Leavers website and consider frequency of visits to prepare care leavers for independence. (To be reviewed by 01/12/2021)**
- 3. Revise the Staying Put Policy using plain English; develop an easy-read version with foster carers and care leavers and consider extending the three-month time limit when a care leaver can return to their foster family. (To be reviewed by 01/12/2020 with any identified changes to policy to be implemented by 01/02/2021)**
- 4. Review the joint protocol between Children’s Social Care (CSC) and Housing Team for assessing and meeting the needs of homeless young people. (To be reviewed and any policy changes implemented within agreed timeframes with the housing team, no later than 01/02/2021)**
- 5. Enable care leavers’ achievements to be acknowledged and give them the opportunity to participate by replicating the offer to Children Looked After.**

Good Practice

The Panel recognised the good work already being undertaken to support Care Leavers. Specifically, they were pleased to see the Council was prioritising a broader and more comprehensive offer of apprenticeships in the Borough and aiming to ensure they were sustainable for the student financially. In addition, the Panel were pleased to note the development of a bespoke partnership with the University of Portsmouth to encourage take up and completion of higher education courses and agreed similar partnerships with other higher education institutions should be created.

Key facts

The Leaving Care Service provides support to young people at various stages of their transition to independent living:

- **Eligible care leavers** are aged 16 or 17, are currently Children Looked After and have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since their 14th birthday;
- **Former relevant care leavers** are aged 18 to 21, are not Children Looked After and have previously been looked after for at least 13 weeks since their 14th birthday. They may be aged 21 or over and still getting support with education/training for as long as the education/training continues.

In March 2019 the care leavers in Bracknell Forest were:

Eligible care leavers	Former relevant care leavers
38 clients	58 clients
100% in suitable accommodation	93% in suitable accommodation
85% in education, employment, training	60% in education, training and employment
100% pathway plan reviews within timescales	97% pathway plan reviews within timescales

A variety of accommodation is available but the majority of care leavers were offered accommodation at one of two bespoke residences: Holly House (35 flats) and Rainforest Walk (26 flats). Councillors visited both these residences during the review and spoke with staff and residents to gain their views about what worked well and what could be improved.

HOLLY HOUSE

35 Flats



RAINFOREST WALK

26 Flats



OWNED BY COUNCIL, SUPPORT PROVIDED BY LOOK AHEAD



£180 PER PERSON
MONTHLY COST OF ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT

“Going from a teen to an adult is tricky at the best of times and we appreciate there are significant issues for those who have not always had a stable home environment.”

Cllr Mrs Birch

What support exists in social care?

The Pathway Plan was co-produced with care leavers.

The team was well thought of internally and externally. This was evidenced during Bracknell's Ofsted inspection in 2017 and by Mark Griddle, a national advisor for care leavers, who had visited to capture good practice. The care leaving team had also been asked to train 30 managers at Sheffield City Council on how to complete a pathway plan and the Care Leavers Team Manager had been part of a peer review for care leavers at Hampshire County Council and Kent County Council, which had provided an opportunity to share good practice.

Co-location with housing, education and social care staff had enabled more joined up working.

Personal Advisers worked hard to build relationships with care leavers but acknowledged work could begin earlier, especially involvement to discuss education and housing options.

Four care leavers were currently taking advantage of the 'Staying Put Policy' 2015. The Council wanted to increase the number

of care leavers 'staying put'. Issues identified with the

'Staying Put Policy' included care leavers only having three months to find out if they could successfully live alone and remuneration for care leavers and foster carers being complex to understand.

A care leaver was being appointed to Bracknell's Corporate Parenting Board, but officers acknowledged there was more to do in terms of engaging care leavers in developing policies and service provision as well as celebrating their successes in life.

What Housing and Education support is available?

Pathway Plans were formulated before a care leaver turned 18 and all care leavers had a virtual Personal Education Plan in place until their 18th birthday.

There were a range of apprenticeships offered but take up was low. In response, officers had begun working with Partners such as Elevate, to develop a broader and more comprehensive offer in the Borough. The Panel recognised this was already being developed.

The number of care leavers staying in education and completing a University level course were also low. The Virtual School Deputy Head had recently been appointed and brought expertise of working with universities and businesses which councillors agreed would help to address this issue.

Officers had a strong partnership with Elevate locally who

employed a dedicated Personal Advisor offering independent advice and guidance for those with an Education, Health and

Care Plan at 16 + and to care leavers.

The Housing Allocation Policy 2015 was due for renewal. Councillors thought the current policy was not equitable as care leavers living in supported accommodation for two years would be classed as category B when 'moving on' unlike care leavers taking advantage of the 'Staying Put Policy'.

A new contract monitoring framework, based on outcomes, would be in place across housing and the People Directorate Commissioning Team from April 2020.

What we saw at Rainforest Walk and Holly House

Councillors were given a tour of both and admired the refurbishment, particularly at Holly House which had received numerous improvements including a new boiler system, windows, roof and gym. Residents had been involved in choosing the paint colour at Rainforest Walk and councillors had an opportunity to view an empty flat. Each new resident was given a new mattress. Concierge 'waking' staff were present during night shifts.

Residents were aged 18-24 years of age. Both types of accommodation accepted young people from the age of 16 but this was rare and special conditions were made to ensure their safety. Residents could stay in this type of supported accommodation for a maximum

of two years. However, some ex residents occasionally called back for advice, i.e. help to complete a benefits form.

Professionals held a meeting each month to try and anticipate which young people might need a flat and when, which councillors considered good practice.

Look Ahead staff signposted residents to other services as necessary, for example they helped them to register at local GP surgeries, although it had proved hard to link into the Community Mental Health Team (CMHT).

Neither accommodate babies or children. If a girl became pregnant whilst residing at either Rainbow Walk or Holly House she would be supported to find alternative accommodation.

What care leavers said about support they receive

Care leavers said the leaving care team were clear about what to use the money for – bought a tumble dryer for example. Councillors asked if advice from the team had included consideration of warranties and he said it did.

One care leaver said they would like to move out to somewhere quieter and this was being discussed with their personal advisor.

The Council helped one care leaver by giving him £60 towards travel costs which enabled him to compete at a high level in his chosen sport.

One care leaver who lived independently and attended a College outside Bracknell said his Personal Advisor travelled to meet with him every six weeks. He gave examples why this was important to him such as when

an outside agency was meant to support him in managing his money but did not turn up to a number of meetings. The Personal Advisor helped him organise alternative arrangements.

Two care leavers said a lot of planning with their Personal Advisor had taken place from the age of 16 to prepare them for adulthood but it still felt like it 'came up quickly'. An issue for one care leaver had been finding out from adult social care and housing teams who was responsible for paying rent. He did admit there were "Some issues on my side. I found it hard to find somewhere to move to. It would have been easier if I'd found somewhere quicker." One care leaver said her transition to supported accommodation was too quick "When moving, I needed a proper chat. A 'welcome to the real world' chat. Say what's going to be different in adults and between different types of housing so if I had to pay water rates or not at each place. I never knew I had to pay water rates where I am now." Councillors thought there was a need for clearer and more accessible advice on money management and life skills, particularly when they first moved into supported or independent accommodation.

All three care leavers said they had received help from social worker with one care leaver calling his relationship with his social worker 'really good' and 'quite a bit of planning' had gone into his transition to Adult Social Care.

Access to local transport was an issue for one care leaver.

Care leavers said it was helpful Council Tax payments were waived.

“The most insightful session was when we spoke to three care leavers about their experience of leaving care and what they think the local authority did well. Their honesty was humbling, and we greatly appreciated their views on what the local authority could do better in the future.”

Cllr Brossard



(L-R) Councillor Brossard, Councillor Mrs Birch and Councillor Temperton with the fitness equipment at Holly House

I would like to thank the Vice Chair of the Education, Skills and Growth O&S Panel, Cllr Brossard, for all his support during this review. I would also like to thank all those councillors who participated in the review. My particular thanks to the officers who presented to us and had a broad representation from different teams including children's social care, health, education and housing so that the review could go into greater depth.

Cllr Mrs Birch, Chair: Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel

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