

To: Overview and Scrutiny Commission
9 September 2021

Evaluation of Overview and Scrutiny Review – Care Leavers Statutory Scrutiny Officer

1 Purpose of report

- 1.1 To feedback the outcome of the follow up review of agreed recommendations from the Care Leavers review, conducted by the Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel. This report to the Commission highlights the Panel's findings from the follow up review into how recommendations from the Care Leavers Review had been implemented.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission endorses the Education, Skills and Growth Panels' decision to conclude its scrutiny work into care leavers.
- 2.2 That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission note the lessons learnt, including:
- reviewing the scoping document to incorporate learning from this follow up review by making clearer the intended outcomes and impact of any recommendations.
 - considering what can be accomplished in one day when designing programme of work.
 - reviews should take place no sooner than 6 months after the agreed implementation date to allow for impact to be embedded

3 Reasons for recommendation

- 3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission is committed to following up review activity by its Panels to critically examine whether recommendations, as agreed by the Executive, have been implemented. This analysis is an opportunity to ensure that its work has a meaningful impact as the credibility of Overview and Scrutiny comes from demonstrable influence in making local people's lives better. The Panels have therefore been tasked by the Commission to try to assess the impact of scrutiny through the impact of the implementation of the agreed recommendations. This assessment extends to evaluation of the review arrangements and performance to flag up lessons learnt and suggest improvements for future activity.
- 3.2 It is the role of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer (SSO) to advise the Council on any issues or concerns that may arise about the operation of the scrutiny function and the SSO may on occasion be required to make a determination about what the law says and how this should be applied to any particular situation. In carrying out this statutory role, there is a need to have a nuanced and meaningful understanding of the scrutiny function, in order to accurately make judgments about its operation when disagreements or other issues arise.
- 3.3 The SSO is also responsible for providing advice to the Commission about whether or not recommendations from a review have been implemented to a sufficient standard or if further work should be commissioned, taking into account the impact this may have on the Panel's work programme.

4 Alternative Options

As part of the review process the Education, Skills and Growth Panel thoroughly considered the response proposed based on the reported implementation progress of the agreed recommendations; the measurement of their impact and assessment of learning to be shared about the conduct of the review process. If the Commission is minded not to accept the recommendations at 2.1 and 2.2 then the potential benefits of a further piece of review activity work would need to be fully assessed against existing priorities and resource requirements of the work programme.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission commissioned the Education, Skills and Growth Panel to carry out a review into care leavers as part of the overview and scrutiny four-year work programme, which has been developed to track themes within the new Council Plan.
- 5.2 The review was undertaken on 22 January 2020. The aim of the review was to seek assurance that care leavers in the borough benefitted from accommodation, education and life skills that ensured they had the best possible chance in life. The review entailed interviewing senior officers, visiting specialised accommodation and speaking to three care leavers in one day.
- 5.3 The final 'Care Leavers Review Report' and five recommendations ([follow link in Appendix A](#)) was agreed by the Commission in October 2020. Subsequently, the Executive agreed to implement the recommendations on November 2020.
- 5.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission is committed to following up review activity by its Panels to ensure implementation of recommendations as agreed by the Executive.
- 5.5 This follow up review work was supported by a Governance and Scrutiny Officer who supported Panel members by organising a meeting and developing a progress document to track completion of the recommendations. The document was circulated to officers in advance of the meeting Appendix B. This involved in the region of 8 hours of scrutiny officer time, including a meeting lasting one hour.
- 5.6 At the recommendations review meeting, held on 14 June 2021, the Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel interviewed the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning; Assistant Director: Early Help and Communities; Assistant Director: Children's Social Care; Life Chances Team Manager and Head of Services: Life Chances. Two of the Care Leavers who participated in the original review also attended this meeting.
- 5.7 During the meeting the Panel noted the majority of recommendations had been implemented in full, with the exception of Recommendation 1 (as contained in [Appendix A](#)). The pandemic had an impact on timescales for this review and was more complex than officers had originally anticipated. However, it was clear progress against the outstanding recommendation was well on the way.
- 5.8 The Panel identified the following outcomes and impact following a meeting of the Panel and additional detail can be found in Appendix B.

- A review of the Housing Allocations Policy was underway.
- The life skills booklet had been relaunched and finance information had been added to the Local Offer Care Leavers Website to ensure consistency in terms of the offer for care leavers. This helps children to be better prepared for adulthood with the appropriate skills and support. The help and support is now more accessible to young people.
- Councillors are more aware of care leavers and can better understand the lived experience to help them as corporate parents.
- Line management for all Children Looked After aged 17.5 years had move to the Assistant Team Manager for Leaving Care to help prepare them for adulthood, which meant visits were increased. This provides better transition and young people have a better understanding of what the support will be like post 18.
- The Staying Put Policy had been updated and was now consistent with most other local authorities. This is now easier for young people and foster carers to understand.
- The Joint Protocol between Children's Social Care and Housing Team had been revised to formally set out responsibilities of each team, allowing staff to work more closely together. This will benefit young people to make it clear what to expect taking into account of past experiences.
- The first annual awards ceremony for care leavers was planned for September 2021. This is to provide an opportunity to share achievements with other young people and share aspirations.

5.9 Panel members noted it would have been easier to review the outcomes and impact of its recommendations if they had been identified more clearly within the initial scope and when the Panel met to discuss and agree its recommendations. It is recommended the initial scoping document for reviews is changed to capture the learning from this review. It was also agreed the schedule for the one-day event was too full and the amount of work involved would be better spread over a number of days.

5.10 In summary, good progress has been made against the recommendations as identified in Appendix A and was adequately resourced. The service department contributed effectively to the review. Future scoping documents need to identify intended outcomes and impact, including a hypothesis for Panel members to 'test' while carrying out their review. This should lead to better outcomes for residents.

5.11 The Panel considered whether this review could be more thematic, and it was agreed to be kept departmental, as it was the first review under the new structure. Future reviews have begun to take a broader approach.

6 Commentary from Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chair, Councillor Gill Birch

6.1 The Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel were satisfied that the majority of the recommendations in the 'Care Leavers Review Report' had been implemented and noted this would be reported to Council in the annual report.

6.2 It was particularly good to see the impact the review had on the support for Care Leavers' so that their lives were improved and the transition to independent living was more stable. This was evidenced by the strengthened formalising of the working relationship of Children's Social care and The Housing Team with the review of their Joint Protocol. In fact, a member of the Housing Team now attended drop in sessions

with Children's Social Care and have a presence in MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub).

Half of all care leavers are now visited by a Personal Advisor and an Assistant Team Manager now oversees the transition into the Care Leavers team.

- 6.3 We conducted this review in one-day, which included interviews as well as on-site visits, but felt it would have been more manageable if we had separated the activities and conducted them across multiple days.
- 6.4 As the first Panel to review its recommendations in a formal way we discovered during the process it was difficult to identify the impact scrutiny work had on the lives of care leavers in the borough. This would have been easier to evaluate if measures to monitor the outcomes with the young carers had been established as part of the process and either a survey or a short meeting with the people interviewed asking the same key questions to establish impact of the review. This learning will hopefully influence future reviews by changing the focus of the scoping document to be clearer about outcomes and impacts which the review is aiming to achieve and how this will be measured rather than just the process of completing a review showing an aspect of the council's services.
- 6.5 We felt it was important to share the learning from this review with the Commission to enable us, and officers and everyone involved in the review, to be clear about the anticipated outcomes and impact of any review.

7 Equalities Impact Assessment

- 7.1 An [Equalities Impact Assessment](#) was conducted when the report was initially completed.

8 Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 8.1 As Corporate Parents it is the duty of the local authority to ensure care leavers in the Borough benefit from accommodation, education and life skills that ensure they have the best possible chance in life. Implementing these recommendations will help to ensure we deliver on our Corporate Parenting duties.

In order for the value of scrutiny to be assessed it is important to monitor the implementation of agreed recommendations and measure their impact. Without this ongoing evaluation significant resources could be devoted to activities that neither add value for improving local residents' lives nor directly support the delivery of the Council's strategic objectives.

- 8.2 There is a risk if we do not learn the lessons from this review that we may struggle to identify the outcomes and impact of future reviews, as well as ensuring they are conducted in as efficient way as possible.

9 Financial Advice

- 9.1 As per the initial review, the recommendations above have no financial implications.

10 Climate Change Implications

- 10.1 The recommendations in Section 2 above are expected to have no impact on emissions of CO2.

As per the initial review, the reasons the Council believes that this will have no impact on emissions are because changes to policy for care leavers does not have a significant impact on climate changes issues.

Contact for further information
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Appendix A

The Care Leavers Review was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission in October 2020 and can be found [Care leavers review - recommendations report | Bracknell Forest Council \(bracknell-forest.gov.uk\)](#)

Appendix B – Report on Care Leavers Review of Recommendations meeting held on 14 June 2021

| | Recommendation as agreed by Executive on 13 October 2020 | Update provided | Chair observations / Panel observations |
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| 1 | <p>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.</p> <hr/> <p>Timescale identified: To be reviewed by 01/02/2021</p> | <p>The Council's Housing Allocation Policy sets out who is awarded priority on the 'My Choice' Housing Register. In 2020 the Policy was updated to reflect the latest homelessness legislation and duties brought in by the Homelessness Reduction Act.</p> <p>A full review of the Allocations Policy is underway. This is a significant undertaking and will include consideration of the needs or, and priority awarded, to a number of specific groups, including Care Leavers and will require a detailed public consultation which will inevitably take some time to complete.</p> <p>For new build housing developments, in negotiating local lettings policies for affordable housing, the Council is consistently seeking agreement to letting a quota of properties to care leavers to secure a stream of suitable move-on accommodation.</p> | <p>It was noted a considerable amount of feasibility work had been undertaken with a view to changing the Housing Allocations Policy and awarding Care Leavers priority status. Cllr Dr Gareth Barnard explained that further evidence to make this change was required, including a full review of the Policy. Cllr Gill Birch, Chair of the Panel, accepted this explanation and that work would continue to check the viability of changing the Housing Allocations Policy.</p> <p>Panel members agreed recommendation 1 had been completed but noted further evidence gathering would continue to further this objective.</p> |
| 2 | <p>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.</p> | <p>The life skills booklet has been relaunched and finance information has now been added to the Local Offer Care Leavers Website https://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/children-and-family-services/fostering-adoption-and-looked-after-children/care-leavers/finances</p> | <p>Panel members welcomed the revision of the life skills booklet to include finance information and how to manage utility bills, etc. These were areas identified by care leavers during the review as issues they struggled with particularly when they became independent.</p> |

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| | <p>Timescale identified: To be reviewed 01/12/2021</p> | <p>This ensures there is a consistency in terms of the offer for care leavers. The line management for all Children Looked After aged 17.5 years has now moved to the Assistant Team Manager for Leaving Care to help prepare them for adulthood. This means that visits are increased as they receive visits from their social worker as well as their personal advisor.</p> | <p>It was also noted the revised version of this booklet was available on the website. Panel Members acknowledged the comprehensive list of contacts now available.</p> <p>Panel members agreed recommendation 2 had been completed.</p> |
| 3 | <p>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.</p> <p>Timescale identified: To be reviewed by 01/12/2020 with any identified changes to policy to be implemented by 01/02/2021)</p> | <p>The policy for Staying Put is now accessed via Tri-X. This means the policy is not only more accessible to all but is now consistent with how most other Local Authorities. There is also guidance through the Fostering Network and Coram BAAF to help with understanding. The Assistant Team Manager for Leaving Care has developed and delivered two training sessions for foster carers around Staying Put and these will continue to be part of the foster carers training programme.</p> <p>The limit in terms of returning to foster family is very much a case by case discussion and we would also focus on what is best for the care leavers in terms of returning.</p> | <p>It was noted the Staying Put Policy had been updated and that it was now consistent with most other local authorities.</p> <p>Panel members agreed recommendation 3 had been completed.</p> |
| 4 | <p>Review the joint protocol between Children's Social Care (CSC) and Housing Team for assessing and meeting the needs of homeless young people.</p> <p>Timescale identified:</p> | <p>Practice and policy have been reviewed and a new joint protocol drafted which has been shared with relevant teams in both Children's and Housing Services. Internal practice and joint working in assessing and meeting the needs of homeless 16/17 year olds is strong.</p> | <p>It was noted the Joint Protocol between Children's Social Care and Housing Team had been revised to formally set out the responsibilities of each team in this area.</p> <p>Panel members agreed recommendation 4 had been completed.</p> |

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| | To be reviewed any policy changes implemented within agreed timeframes with the housing team, no later than 01/02/2021. | Housing and Welfare Services have also instigated a weekly drop-in for Children's Services staff (across the front door, social care and early help) to consult on cases, which facilitates closer working. Prior to the onset of the pandemic, Housing also attended the MASH once a week and this will resume when services are operating normally again. | |
| 5 | Enable care leavers' achievements to be acknowledged and give them the opportunity to participate by replicating the offer to Children Looked After. | We are in the process of planning for an annual awards ceremony for Care Leavers and also extending the participation offer to care leavers. | It was acknowledged this piece of work had been delayed due to the pandemic. Panel members asked when this recommendation would be implemented and were informed there was a provisional date in September. |
| | Timescale identified: To be reviewed by 01/12/2021. | The leaving care team are now using Braccan Walk as a location for Care Leavers to walk in to meet with PA's as well as a PA being based with Rainforest Walk. This is a means of proactively seeking out to support Care Leavers as opposed to them having to come to us for help and support. | Panel members were pleased to note a Care Leaver was to be appointed to sit on the Bracknell Forest Participation Group to seek their views on a wide range of projects. Panel members agreed recommendation 5 had been completed and looked forward to attending the event in September to celebrate Care Leavers' achievements. |