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**Meeting:** Corporate Parenting Panel  
**Date:** 21 July 2014  
**Subject:** Progress review & update action plan of Pathways for Looked After Children & Care Leavers.  
**Report of:** Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Children's Services  
**Summary:** The report outlines the steps taken to improve the quality of Pathway Plans for Looked After Children & Care Leavers.

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**Advising Officer:** Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Children's Services Operations  
**Contact Officer:** Afzal Ahmed, Team Manager Leaving Care Team  
**Public/Exempt:** Public  
**Wards Affected:** All  
**Function of:** Council

## **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Council Priorities:**

- The Children & Young People's Plan 2011-2014 - Improved educational attainment.
- Central Bedfordshire Council's Medium Term Plan - Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable.

### **Financial:**

1. None

### **Legal:**

2. Pathway Plans are completed and reviewed within statutory requirements under the Children Act 1989.

### **Risk Management:**

3. Regulatory Risks: Failure to review or complete Pathway Plans will be a breach of statutory requirements under the Children Act 1989.

### **Staffing (including Trades Unions):**

4. Not Applicable.

**Equalities/Human Rights:**

5. Looked After & Leaving Care Services provided to Looked After & Care Leavers affects all sectors of communities.

**Public Health**

6. Not applicable.

**Community Safety:**

7. Not Applicable.

**Sustainability:**

8. Not Applicable.

**Procurement:**

9. Not applicable.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to note the content of the report.**

**Background**

10. For every 16 or 17 year old who has been looked after by a local authority for a period of 13 weeks or more since the age of 14, at least one day of which is after his 16th birthday, are entitled to leaving care provisions. This means that the responsible local authority has a duty to provide the young person with a qualified social worker followed by the appointment of a personal advisor at the age of 18 years. The social worker must carry out an assessment of the young person's needs in order to determine what advice, assistance and support the young person requires, both whilst they are being looked after, and once they cease to be looked after. The local authority must also prepare and complete a detailed plan called a "Pathway Plan" by 16 years and 3 months. The Plan should be reviewed every 6 months until the young person ceases to be a care leaver at age of 21 or up to 25 year if the young person is pursuing further or higher education.

11. A previous audit of Pathway Plans carried out by an independent consultant in December 2012 highlighted the following findings:
  - a. Key information was not recorded or was missing in the Pathway Plans
  - b. Some of the plans were not SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely) and did not include the views and wishes and feelings of the young person.
  - c. Some Pathway Plans were nothing more than a short narrative about the young person's situation and lacked what steps a young person needed to achieve his or her goals.
  - d. Almost half of the Pathway Plans audited had no information in 'Back Up' sections, which suggests little contingency planning.

### **Purpose of the Report**

12. This report provides a briefing on our analysis of a sample of Pathway Plans that were audited in May 2014. The audit focused on two key factors that are key in order to achieve good outcomes for pathway planning for looked after children and care leavers which are as follows:
  - a) The Pathway Plans need to be sufficiently detailed. The young person needs to be able to identify the steps he or she needs to take to achieve his or her goals and know to whom to turn for support.
  - b) The Pathway Plans needs to 'clearly identify a child's needs, and what actions need to be taken, by whom and when' , in the sense that a Pathway Plan should be a 'detailed operational plan' so that it can be used 'as a means of checking whether or not the objectives are being met'.
13. This report outlines the work undertaken to date and identifies gaps in order to ensure that Pathway Plans are meaningful and evidence improved outcomes for looked after children and care leavers.

### **Methodology**

14. In order to complete this analysis, thirty cases were randomly selected from the 16+ Leaving Care Service. In this cohort 15 of the audits were looked After Children and the other 15 cases selected were Care Leavers age 18 and above.

15. The Managers in the service undertook an audit of each Pathway Plan, focusing on the following key questions that were taken directly from the new Ofsted inspection framework.
- a. Young people leaving care and preparing to leave care receive support and help to assist them in making a successful transition to adulthood.
  - b. The plans for them to leave care are effective and address their individual needs. They are safe and feel safe, particularly where they live.
  - c. Young people acquire the necessary level of skill and emotional resilience to successfully move towards independence.
  - d. They are able to successfully access education, employment, training and safe housing.

### Performance Indicators

16. There are two national key performance measures in respect of care leavers (see below). These performance measures are based on data we collect about the young people we work with, in or around their 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.
- I. NI 147: No of 19, 20 & 21 year old care leavers, with suitable accommodation
  - II. NI 148: No of 19, 20 & 21 year old care leavers, in Employment, Education or Training
17. The table below shows our current performance as of 31 March 2014

NI 147: No of 19, 20 & 21 year old care leavers, with suitable accommodation

Age	March 2014 *
19	89%
20	75%
21	79%

NI 148: No of 19, 20 & 21 year old care leavers, in Employment, Education or Training

Age	March 2014 *
19	64%
20	65%
21	57%

\* provisional data

18. The table below shows the comparative performance of NI147 & NI148 with our statistical neighbours & England, the most recent available is for 2012/13.

NI 147: No of 19 year old care leavers, with suitable accommodation

<b>Local Authority, Region &amp; England</b>	<b>2011/2012</b>	<b>2012/2013</b>
Central Bedfordshire	83.3%	89.7%
Statistical Neighbours	87.2%	87.2%
England	88.3%	88.4%

NI 148: No of 19 year old care leavers, in Employment, Education or Training

<b>Local Authority, Region &amp; England</b>	<b>2011/2012</b>	<b>2012/2013</b>
Central Bedfordshire	56%	44.8%
Statistical Neighbours	54.8%	55.6%
England	58%	58%

19. There is a gap in our current sufficiency provision in that we do not have enough semi-independent accommodation providers who are “quality-assured” in order to meet the needs of our looked after children and care leavers and, as a result, some of our young people are remaining in residential children’s home for longer than is required. As reported at the last Corporate Parenting Panel, we have commenced a tendering process which once concluded will be able to provide more choice locally.
20. Together with the security of accommodation, participation in learning or work is crucially important if young people are to make a successful transition from care and become economically independent and viable young adults. The service is therefore working with our partners including virtual school; youth support services and local colleges to ensure that our young people are given the right advice and support.

### **Analysis and Audit Outcomes**

21. The following themes emerged from the audit carried out in May 2014:

The overall findings have indicated that the quality of Pathway Plans improved since the last comprehensive audit undertaken in December 2013

Below is a summary of the findings:

### **What was good:**

- i. Out of the 30 Pathway Plans audited all were reviewed within time-scales.
- ii. There was evidence that young people leaving care and preparing to leave care receive support and help to assist them in making a successful transition to adulthood.
- iii. The Pathway Plans were effective and addressed young people's individual needs. Young people are safe and feel safe, particularly where they live. Keep Safe Plans for those at risk were completed could have been SMARTER.
- iv. The majority of the Pathway Plans showed that young people do acquire the necessary level of skills and develop emotional resilience to successfully move towards independence. Where this was not the case extra support was provided.
- v. In all of the 30 cases audited, risks identified, such as sexual exploitation and missing from care were being managed by interventions from the social worker and relevant agencies i.e. Brooks, Youth Offending Service and Sexual Exploitation Panel. There was evidence of multi-agency response to identified risks; for example, Strategy Meetings were held.
- vi. The Pathway Plans were written in a clear and concise manner and were easy to read and jargon free.
- vii. The young person's wishes and feelings were evident in the majority of the Pathway Plans. Many young people found the pathway planning process positive. This was evidenced in the individual Pathway Plans.
- viii. In the majority of the Pathway Plans young people were able to successfully access education, employment, training and safe housing. Where this was not the case there was evidence of multi-agency interventions to improve outcomes for the young person. For example, discussions held at the monthly tracking meeting.

### **Areas identified for improvement on:**

- i. More robust evidence of contingency planning so that young people know what will happen if things are not going according to plan.
- ii. Encourage young people to get involved in extra curricular activities, such as volunteering, joining in Children in Care Council or take up some extra curricular activities outside of college.
- iii. Encourage young people to engage with a Mentoring or Independent Visitors scheme.
- iv. Multi-agency feedback from partner agencies should be evidenced in the Pathway Plans; for example college tutors.

### **Next Steps**

#### **22. What we will do to address these issues.**

- i. Young people are being offered the choice of engaging with an Independent Visitor through NYAS. This will be evidenced in the next Pathway Plan Review, which takes place every 6 months. Supervising Managers will ensure that this has been implemented.
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- iii. Reflective Practice Workshop on writing a SMART Pathway Plan was delivered in May 2014 along with written guidance. This will be followed in each worker's PDR review and monthly supervision.
- iv. Managers will observe practice where Pathway Plan is discussed with the young person, using the Ofsted observation tool. The findings will help us improve the pathway planning and review process.
- v. Tracking is in place to ensure Pathway Plans are reviewed within a 6-monthly time-scale. This will be monitored in our weekly performance meetings and published in our monthly team score-card. This will be done in conjunction with the IRO, where young people remain looked after.
- vi. We are monitoring and formulating action plans for young people who are at risk of becoming NEET through the Monthly 'Support for Success Panel' which aims to:
  - Problem solve educational difficulties for Looked After Children & Care Leavers [(15-21 or 25)]
  - Agree joint action plans and accountabilities for each case.

- vii. The CiCC have asked us to review the format of the Pathway Plan and make it more users friendly. This will be completed by the end of June 2014.
- viii. In partnership with Ray Halford Learning and Development Manager, we will deliver a bespoke training programme for all Social Workers and Personal Advisors – as recommended in the Children Act 1989 Guidance & Regulations Volume 3 Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers (April 2011)
- ix. We will undertake a follow-up audit by the end of November 2014 [bearing in mind the 6-monthly review cycle], focusing on the outcomes of the Action Plan outlined above.

**Appendices:**

None

**Background Papers:**

None