

Report to: Children's Services, Young People and Sport Scrutiny Committee

Date: 31st January 2008

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Report No: 10

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Report Title: **Update on Children Leaving Care Scrutiny Panel
Recommendations**

**Confidential /
Non Confidential:**

(**Non-Confidential**) This report does **not** contain information which warrants its consideration in the absence of the press or members of the public

Purpose:

This report provides an update in relation to the recommendations made by the Leaving Care Scrutiny Panel convened during 2006, and reporting on 21st June 2007.

Recommendations:

The Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the contents of this update report.

Decision:

Background Doc(s):

Minutes of meetings of the Children Leaving Care Scrutiny Panel.
Minutes of the Children's Services, Young People, and Sport Scrutiny Committee 21st June 2007.

Signed:

Leader / Executive Member

Monitoring Officer

Date:

Summary:

This Report provides an update from the Executive Member for Children's Services on information and actions taken in relation to the Children Leaving Care Scrutiny Panel recommendations, reported to the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee on 21st June 2007.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** The Children Leaving Care Scrutiny Panel was established by Members because of concerns about the lack of success of children and young people leaving local authority care, and a desire to improve outcomes for this group.
- 1.2** The Leaving Care Scrutiny Panel reported to the Children's Services, Young People, and Sport Scrutiny Panel on 21st June 2007. The focus of the recommendations of the Panel was primarily in relation to accommodation and support issues, but there were also concerns about the education, training and employment needs of care leavers.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The final report of the Scrutiny Panel identified a number of recommendations:

- The introduction of advisory packs detailing accommodation provision for children leaving care.
- To consider the possibility of establishing a Scrutiny Panel within the next Municipal Year to look at the educational provision for Looked After Children.
- To consider the possibility of the Children's and School Policy Development Group (PDG) to undertake any issues that could arise from the introduction of the Government Green Paper – Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care.
- To consider the range of suitable accommodation for young people leaving care, which includes the opportunity for staged moves through different types of housing.
- In recognition of the lack of semi-independent accommodation, consideration of the possibility of a model scheme should be given for implementation in the Bolton area.

3. CARE MATTERS WHITE PAPER

At the time of the Children's Scrutiny Panel meeting in June 2007, the publication of the Care Matters White Paper was awaited. The White Paper was published in the summer.

In relation to young people leaving care, there are specific features and implications.

The White Paper recognises that young people in care often have a difficult move to adulthood. The opportunity to delay the change until they are ready is not always a possibility, leading to unwanted transitions that happen too fast. Nationally there is a concern that young people leaving the care system will not have the skills necessary to cope on their own. Young people without parental and family support are often exposed to greater risks than other adolescents.

In response, to improve the transition to adulthood, the White Paper makes a number of proposals:

- Pilot greater involvement of young people in deciding when they move to independence. Young people's wishes and feelings should be respected and they

should be fully involved in decisions that affect them. Moves should only take place if young people are properly prepared.

- Provide young people with the opportunity to benefit from staying with foster carers – or, if appropriate, in residential care – until age 21.
- Extending the entitlement to the support of a personal advisor up to the age of 25 for all care leavers who are either in education or wish to return to education.
- Introducing a national bursary to provide a minimum of £2000 for all young people in care who go on to Higher Education.
- Place £100 per year in the Child Trust Fund account of every eligible child who spends the year in care.
- Expecting local authorities to consider very seriously what employment opportunities with training they and their partners can offer young people.

For the next three years, grant funding allocation is £212,005, £287,874 and £330,929.

4. WORKING TOWARDS IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCRUTINY PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The White Paper

The most significant development during this period has been the publication of the White Paper. It is important to understand and prioritise the requirements of this piece of legislation. Given the findings of the Scrutiny Panel, it is likely that local priorities will be:

- the development of suitable local, supported accommodation for young people leaving care
- the ability of young people to remain in care placements beyond their 18th birthday, where this is appropriate
- improving the educational opportunities and outcomes for these young people
- improving information, employment and training opportunities similarly

4.2 Information About Accommodation Available for Young People

An information leaflet has been developed for young people leaving care or in need of emergency accommodation.

4.3 Scrutiny Panel to Look At The Education of Looked After Children

A Scrutiny Panel “The Educational Attainment of Looked After Children and Young People” has been established from October 2007, and will aim to report by April 2008.

The Panel will look at the services and support provided to children in care to enable them to succeed in their learning and attainment. ‘Narrowing the Gap’ for disadvantaged groups is a key council aim. Looked After Children and young people are one of the key groups needing additional help and support to enable them to improve their life chances. Although much work has already been done in relation to this, and more work is planned, the gap in

outcomes for LAC is still great and needs ongoing attention.

The Scrutiny Panel will allow the council to continue to focus on the educational attainment of looked after children in Bolton, with the possibility of taking into consideration the findings of the Joint Area Review (JAR) and Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) that have recently taken place, whilst also incorporating the Local Area Agreement (and LPSA) priorities which are already in place.

4.4 Accommodation

The Leaving Care Scrutiny Panel was concerned to identify and develop a range of local provision to assist young people leaving care.

The aim would be to provide a range of accommodation that young people can enter at different stages, according to their needs and circumstances. Young people leaving care often have a significant level of need and the range of stable, safe and secure accommodation is important to assist the transition to adult life.

An ideal range of provision would include:

- Emergency Accommodation
- Semi-Independent Provision (small, staffed, bed-sit type accommodation)
- Supported Lodgings
- Floating support to young people in own accommodation (including emergency support)
- Respite provision, short term provision where young people can be helped if they are struggling to cope with independence

The Leaving Care Scrutiny Panel identified the local Cornerhouse Project as a potentially useful resource for young people. This project only opened in January 2007 and has semi-independent accommodation for three young people aged 16+ years. This facility has been used for some local young people leaving care and appears to provide a useful 'model'. Some discussion is taking place about the development of this type of provision, particularly to prevent young people having to leave the Borough. Similarly, the development of local accommodation for young people in urgent or emergency need is at an advanced stage, and funding is identified.

Compared to many Local Authorities, Bolton has a good amount of provision for young people. However local provision does not always meet the needs of those identified as the most challenging. Ongoing partnership work is necessary to ensure that care leavers are given appropriate priority by local accommodation providers.

The development of the full range of suitable local accommodation is a medium to long term objective and will require additional financial resources. The use of Supporting People funding to provide housing related support services to vulnerable young people is also very important. Supporting People currently funds a number of local projects that are used by care leavers.

4.5 Supporting People: Vulnerable Young People

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The Supporting People strategy aims to provide housing related support services to help vulnerable people live in good quality housing. A number of local services provided to vulnerable young people receive funding through the Supporting People initiative:

- **Bolton Young Persons Housing Scheme** – single people aged 16-25 who are homeless or in special need of housing
- **BASE (Bolton Accommodation Support for Employment)** – supported housing for up to two years for people aged 16-25 years who are homeless or who wish to live independently
- **NCH Bolton Accommodation Project** – supported lodgings and visiting support
- **Urban Outreach** – short-term supported lodgings for young people aged 16-25
- **Catholic Children's Rescue Society** – supported housing to teenage parents or young single females with or without a child
- **Manchester Methodist Housing Association (Great Places)** – temporary supported accommodation to mothers and babies and also women with housing support needs
- **Bolton At Home** – floating support for teenage parents
- **NCH New Beginnings** – floating support for teenage parents

It is proposed to undertake a strategic review of housing related support services provided to vulnerable young people during 2008. The review will consider the effectiveness and value for money offered by local services, and will aim to ensure that resources are targeted appropriately.

5. ACTIONS IDENTIFIED FOR 2008

- To complete the strategic review of Supporting People funding and provision
- To evaluation the full costs of implementing the Care Matters legislation
- To establish priorities for the three year grant spend
- To report to the Policy Development Group
- To continue partnership working with local accommodation providers to ensure the needs of care leavers are prioritised (service level agreements)
- To continue dialogue with local providers in relation to semi-independent accommodation
- To finalise the development of emergency accommodation for vulnerable young people
- To continue to focus on the education, training and employment needs of LAC

- To work in partnership with local providers to establish good quality, suitable accommodation for young people when they are able to live independently
- To develop an in-house approved lodgings scheme

6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This report does not require an EIA. As it does not require a decision on a policy change from the Formal Executive Member.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the contents of this update report.