



**CITY OF PLYMOUTH**

## **Scrutiny Report on the Care Leavers Service**

### **Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

**January 2003**

'Overview and scrutiny is potentially the most exciting and powerful element of the entire local Government modernisation process. It places members at the heart of policy-making and at the heart of the way in which Councils respond to the demands of modernisation. In addition, overview and scrutiny is the mechanism by which Councils can achieve active community leadership, good governance and by which Councillors can become powerful and influential politicians.'

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: 'The Development of Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government', September 2002

## CITY OF PLYMOUTH

**Report:** Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Education and Children's Services

**Subject:** Care Leavers Service

**Committee:** Overview and Scrutiny Commission

6<sup>th</sup> February, 2003

**Ref:** 3/OSC/E&CS

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**Executive Summary:** The purpose of this report is to submit recommendations to the Executive following meetings of the scrutiny panel responsible for reviewing the Care Leavers Service.

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**Corporate Strategy:** The establishment of Scrutiny Committees forms part of the corporate strategy for implementation of that part of the modernisation agenda relative to new democratic arrangements.

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**Financial Implications:** Not quantified at this stage.

**Other Implications:** Not known at this stage.

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### Recommendations:

- (a) It is recommended that all issues surrounding accommodation for care leavers needs to be considered as a matter of urgency and in particular the recommended action detailed in paragraph 6 be pursued.
- (b) Evaluation on progress of the Care Leavers Service be reviewed by the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee in July 2003.

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### Background papers:

- (i) Best Value Review – Young People Leaving Care (ECS 18 02/03)
- (ii) Initial Action Plan in response to the Social Services Inspectorate
- (iii) Young Peoples Consultation Event (ECS 28 02/03)
- (iv) Corporate Parent Role Briefing Note (ECS 29 02/03)
- (v) Richard Porter Notes on Care Leavers Service (ECS 31 02/03)

# REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL - EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

## CARE LEAVERS SERVICE

### 1.0 Introduction

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission agreed a work programme for the Overview and Scrutiny Panels at its meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2002. It was agreed that the topic to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Education and Children's Services would be Care Leavers Service.

### 2.0 Panel Structure

#### Councillors

Councillor Mrs Jones, in the Chair.  
Councillor Camp, Vice Chairman.  
Councillors Mrs Ford, Mrs Foster, Jordan and Mrs Purnell

#### Co-opted Members

Mr Milon

#### Witnesses

9 care leavers

#### Lead Officers

Jane Hampton – Jane Hampton, Head of Service, Children & Families Division  
Paul Mansell – Child Placement Service Manager  
Richard Porter – Service Manager, Care Leavers Service

Panel Administrator – Christine Crown, Legal and Democratic Services Department.

### 3.0 Objectives

3.1 To reach a decision on the way forward for the Care Leavers Service.

### 4.0 Hearings

The Panel met on four occasions, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2002, 25<sup>th</sup> October 2002, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2003 and 17<sup>th</sup> January 2003, to read background papers, hear from witnesses and formulate a report of recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 6<sup>th</sup> February, 2003.

## **5.0 The Panel's Findings**

- 5.1 The Care Leavers Act came into effect in October 2001. This Act required Local Authorities to offer defined support to Care Leavers encompassed within the provisions of the Act. This did not however include certain young people who were previously provided for under Section 24 of the Children Act 1989.
- 5.2 The Initial Action Plan came about as a result of the Best Value Review, which highlighted that there was an unacceptable level of unallocated cases within the Care Leavers Service. As at 20<sup>th</sup> September 2002, there were 22 unallocated child protection cases, 46 cases where young people were looked after without an allocated worker and approximately 400 cases requiring family support where no worker had been available.

The spread of risk to children and young people and the differential pressure on teams in different sectors had driven the Initial Action Plan, which was written in a way to target the areas where action was urgently required and where progress and change would have to be initiated in the next 3-4 months, i.e. October 2002 – January 2003.

Critical areas for initiating change during this period were –

- size of referral teams and team leaders spans of control;
  - introduction of workload management;
  - use of eligibility criteria and the assessment process;
  - management of the size of the looked after population, in particular the independent sector spend;
  - development of a divisionary strategy, underpinned by family support services;
  - effective staff recruitment and retention.
- 5.3 Following completion of the Best Value Process, the Care Leavers Action Group was dissolved, to be replaced by a Care Leavers Management Board. The Board consisted of senior officers from Health, Social and Housing Services, National Children's Home (NCH), ConneXions Service and the Supporting People Team, the managers of both the Care Leavers Service and the NCH project report to the board. The Board was chaired by Gerry Cadogan Private Care Trust [PCT] and other organisations with clear responsibilities for care leavers would be invited to attend. The views of young people would be central to the work of the board and urgent consideration was being given to how young people could contribute meaningfully to the design, delivery and evaluation of the service.
- 5.4 The overall picture of care leavers who had been placed in a foster home aged 16+ had naturally moved on in time to an independent way of life. Although there were a number of children who have had very poor experiences within the system and chose, once at the age of 16+, to reject the care leavers system, efforts had been made to help them towards adulthood and to fit back into the general community.
- 5.5 Access to central government funding was available to provide financial help to supporters of young adults aged 18+ (currently approximately 60 young adults); Social Services were making full use of the Supporting People initiative.

- 5.6 Young People, while they were looked after would have had a general review, which included their individual care plan and an education plan to ensure a school placement was offered. Lifelong Learning staff attended the weekly City Panel, which provided continual links between key staff. Problems had arisen when trying to provide schooling when the placement had been outside of Plymouth.
- 5.7 Personal advisers would be assigned to young people when they left school formally, whereby assistance would be offered to help them find suitable education training at work opportunities. There were a number of schemes within Plymouth, which helped to re-introduce young people to learning and new routines. General feedback demonstrated improvements for continued opportunities for young people in the care leavers service and also for the young adult who had left.
- 5.8 The majority of young people who were looked after in Plymouth lived with foster carers. A number of foster carers continue to offer support and lodgings, after a young person reached the age of 18 years.

There were plans this year to separate fostering from adoption services in Plymouth and to update the fostering handbook.

When young people of 19+ lose their central government income support, continuing further education such as 'A' Levels etc can prove difficult, the City Council currently provide financial support in these circumstances.

Accommodation had been a large area of concern, recent feedback from care leavers on the general standard of accommodation had been encouraging, and a programme strategy would be formulated from the research gained over the past year and from obtaining advice from other local authorities.

The 'stand alone' Care Leavers data base system would continue to be used whilst further work was carried out on inputting of information to Care First, to ensure that all the fields required by the Care Leavers Service in the future would be accommodated. Eventually it was hoped just to use Care First.

- 5.12 Procedures for collating information and tracking young people within the system had been implemented and proved successful, unfortunately this could not be migrated into the new computer system and would have to be completed manually.

Recruitment would continue until all clerical posts within the Care Leavers Service had been filled. A new post of 'Independent Reviewing Officer was being created and social workers would be added to the Care Leavers Team This would be necessary as the team take on the remit of a continuing care and Care Leavers team.

The care leavers who contributed to this scrutiny work programme found the joint meeting between members and social services staff very rewarding and they took the opportunity to thank the Out of Hours Team for their help. It was clear the care leavers would like to see the joint meeting as a regular event.

## **6.0 Panel's Recommended Action**

- 6.1 A formal 'Young Persons Board' be set up to regularly assess current issues and enable feedback from care leavers to the Initial Action Plan. This forum should meet on a 6 monthly basis and comprise of care leavers, designated Council Members and Officers.

The Initial Action Plan be updated in January 2003 to report on progress made regarding the critical areas outlined at 5.2 and to address all other recommendations as suggested in the Social Services Inspection Report carried out in February 2002.

- 6.2 An individually planned approach for regular support from, and easy access to, the same person, in order to build up a trusting relationship is needed. This support mechanism should offer basic life skills for coping with day to day living, finance/budget training and comfort in handling difficult and distressing situations. Help, only when a crisis occurs, is not acceptable.
- 6.3 Easier access to grants for both care leavers and foster parents is essential.
- 6.4 Foster home placements need to be considered and handled carefully. Frequent moves are not in the interest of young people.
- 6.5 The transition from foster care to 'own home' must be smooth and well planned.
- 6.6 Section 24 care leavers' needs should be evaluated and supported.
- 6.7 A performance management framework for Children's Services, which also describes key data to be shared with Councillors is currently being drawn up. For the Care Leavers Service, of particular importance is the evidencing of contact with Care Leavers and the tracking of their employment.

Strategic requirements also for Care leavers: Reassessment of need and Pathway Plan by the time young person is 16 yrs and 3 months.

Pathway Plan to be reviewed at not less than six monthly intervals

Department to have contact with the young person not less than four times a year.

Young person to have named Personal Adviser

Department is primary income provider for young people between 16 and 18

Department has to ensure Suitable Accommodation for 16- 18 yr olds.

- 6.8 Councillors will be invited to strengthen their corporate parenting role by inclusion in events such as the recent consultation with Care Leaves.

This will also be through visits to our Children's Residential Units, including in the monthly fostering panel and through a regular consultation with all of our looked after young people.

## **7.0 Implementation and Monitoring**

The Initial Action Plan, in response to the Social Services Inspectorate of Children's Services, be reviewed and progress be evaluated by 31<sup>st</sup> July 2003, in particular the key elements outlined below.

- communication and implementation of the future Work Programme – structures;
- critical issues for immediate action;
- size of referral teams and team leaders spans of control;
- introduction of workload management;
- use of eligibility criteria and the assessment process;
- looked after children/young people;
- development of diversionary strategy, underpinned by family support services;
- effective staff recruitment and retention;
- performance management;
- re-alignment of Family Placement and Adoption Services;
- involvement of Elected Members;
- Best Value reviews;
- management information;
- training.

## **8.0 Summary**

8.1 All issues surrounding accommodation for care leavers needs to be considered as a matter of urgency.

## **9.0 Chairman's Summary**

The Chairman, on behalf of the Panel, would like to -

- (a) confirm that the topic of the Care Leavers Service has been considered with conscientious and serious application;
- (b) thank all the officers and witnesses concerned for their contributions, in particular for the setting up of the Care Leavers meeting with Councillors.