



Councillor Rachel Hodson
Chair,
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Scrutiny Panel
c/o Scrutiny Office
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Dear Rachel

Please find below an initial response from myself to the Schools, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel's review – Outcome for Care Leavers, which I will be discussing with Councillor Nuala Fennelly on her return to the office, in order that she can ensure the recommendations are followed up.

Firstly, I welcome the report from the Scrutiny Panel, and would like to thank them for their time and effort, and their clear commitment to improving the outcomes for looked after young people and care leavers. Panel members have dedicated a significant amount of time to review the service provided, and have made a number of positive comments, observations and recommendations.

I am pleased to say that we have already responded to a number of the comments made by the members throughout their involvement. Some of the changes were made immediately, and therefore before the report was received. Further work has been on-going since the visits were completed, and we are currently planning how we can implement the remaining recommendations over the coming year.

As a detailed response I have set out my comments in line with each of the recommendations from the final report.

Recommendation 1

The Executive be requested to undertake a review into the possibility of starting the preparations for leaving care process earlier in a young person's life and report back to the Panel in 6 months with progress, if accepted.

I would support this recommendation. There are examples of other local authorities who consider the leaving care process earlier than we do in DMBC. We need to separate out the activities associated with preparing a young person to move from the care system into the next phase of their life on the one hand, with the structural and systems changes needed on the other. Some local authorities have a 15+ service or a 13+ service and some have an entirely separate Leaving Care Service. This can have the advantage of avoiding a change in social

worker at the crucial time of GCSEs, and can allow for a social worker to stay with the young person for a longer period of time from 13/15 years of age through to 17/18 when they leave care, or to stay with the same social worker until they leave care. However, whenever the transition is set, it builds in another change of social worker, and one of the key messages from children and young people is always about their preference for staff who stay with them through the various changes they have to go through.

That said, there can be a disadvantage of keeping the same social worker from birth to 18 in relation to the potential loss of the particular social work expertise required for care leavers which is more focused on accommodation, education/employment/training/, benefits, independence, etc. Social workers of younger children tend to focus on and have expertise in areas of child protection, court process, schools and looked after children processes.

However, accepting that no point of transfer of social worker is not without its issues, we do accept there needs to be a formal review of this process, given that it has been a source of some dissatisfaction amongst young people. I therefore plan to undertake a formal consultation with staff, partners and care leavers who have undergone or are about to undergo the process, with a view to building in the very best practice and ensuring that Doncaster young people receive excellent preparation for independence and adulthood. I will explore local authorities who re-considered leaders of provision in this area. It will be important that this work is completed in advance of moves into the Children's Trust.

Recommendation 2

The Executive be requested to undertake an investigation into whether Council guidance/good practice could be produced on the maximum number of units provided in semi-independent dwellings when companies approach the Council to establish new supported housing.

I would support this recommendation. Substantial research was undertaken when the commissioning process reviewed the new semi-independence framework in 2012. We extensively consulted other local authorities and private providers, as well as voluntary organisations, to see what was available on the market. However, a year down the line I believe it is worth reviewing our contracts and their success in line with the particular needs of Doncaster and our Doncaster young people. It may well be that those requirements from one year ago have changed, or the experience of the young people using these new providers could change our view. Once again part of this review will incorporate the wishes and feelings of the young people in those accommodation providers, as well as the thoughts of other significant people, including foster carers, elected members, etc. In addition to this review there is already on-going work to ensure the local authority can meet its obligation in terms of ensuring 'sufficiency' of placements. Although this work is predominantly for looked after children's regulated placements (foster care and children's homes) we will ensure that semi-independence and care leaver's provision will be part of this work.

Recommendation 3

The Executive be requested to investigate whether additional support, guidance and signposting can be offered to young people leaving care, who have additional needs, but fall short of meeting the Adult Services care criteria.

I support this recommendation, and this area had been identified as an issue to be addressed prior to the Panel's report. Specific managers from Children's, Adult's and the Disability Services and education have been approached with a view to formulating a task and finish group to look at improving the transitional processes for these young people. The ultimate

objective will be to draft a Best Practice guidance and process, in order to improve the provision for those specific young people, although this process is still at an early stage.

Recommendation 4

Contact between the Foster Care Team, 16 Plus service and foster carers be developed to bring about improvement in service provision and relationships between young people and the service, where this is appropriate.

I support this recommendation, and indeed across the Children in Care Service as a whole there is a drive to make foster carers and residential staff more central to the care planning processes. It is acknowledged that some of the information and knowledge within the 16+ team could be better shared with our colleagues in Fostering. Some of the comments made clearly arose from a lack of understanding around transitions, the legislation, choices available, and the roles of the personal advisors. In turn, that lack of understanding seems to have arisen from the inadequate channels of communication between the Fostering Service and foster carers and the 16+ Service. The respective Service Managers and Team Managers have already met and discussed ways forward to improve the sense of working in partnership, so as to maintain foster carers more central to the processes. We will be looking to establish more joint meetings for managers and workers, offer joint training, provide drop-in sessions for foster carers to attend 16+ advice workshops and produce a 16+ booklet and guidance to be available to supervising social workers and foster carers, including contact names and numbers for the 16+ staff team. I have also discussed how we can elicit more involvement for foster carers around the care planning and pathway planning process (including residential staff).

Recommendation 5

The Executive is asked to:

- (a) investigate the possibility of care leavers being guaranteed interviews and work shadowing with the Council; and**
- (b) report to the Panel in 6 months on this issue and how the Employability Plan is working in practice and being embedded into the pathways for care leavers.**

I support this recommendation. This piece of work is already underway and has been for several months. The Children and Young People's Service produced an Employability Plan in June 2013 which has attained the From Care2Work kite mark. This Plan has work experience/shadowing as one of its main strands. The Employability Plan is supported by and involves all four Directorates and has a Head of Service leading on each of the four main strands. The project continues to expand in terms of the number of young people it is supporting into the work/apprenticeship arena, and we will be pleased to update the Panel in a further 6 months. The Employability Plan has already been shared with the Scrutiny Panel.

Recommendation 6

The 16 Plus team be requested to:-

- (a) provide Doncaster College and other appropriate education establishments with a list of young people leaving care who require education packages tailored to their future; and**
- (b) continue building on current links and partnership arrangements with Doncaster College and other education establishments.**

I support this recommendation. Much of this work has already been completed or is underway. The Doncaster College representative has attended our 16+ team meeting, and they have also met with the 16+ managers, in addition to attending the formal 'Better Education for Children in Care' group chaired by the Assistant Director for Education. Data and information is now shared between the College and 16+ team via their named representative and our own education/employment/training personal advisor. These meetings have already taken place and we intend to formalise this with a service level agreement which will also form part of the Employability Plan.

Recommendation 7

Promote the mentor programme for young people and encourage its value within the Doncaster Community and with Council employees to encourage the offer of positive guidance and friendship.

I support this recommendation. The Mentor Scheme is one of the four strands of the Employability Plan. As stated above, it has the support and involvement of all four Directorates, and has a named Head of Service lead. The work has already been disseminated across the council with individuals already identified to be mentors. Role (job) descriptions are being created, alongside guidance and training for those who have agreed to take up the mentoring role. Young people have been involved in the discussions, in terms of what provisions they would like to be available. This aspect of the project is well underway and we expect to have it embedded in the offer to care leavers by the time we report back to the Scrutiny Panel.

Recommendation 8

Information on care leaver's outcomes be integrated into future quarterly performance monitoring reports to Scrutiny including numbers, age profile, pathway plans in place, type of accommodation and employment and education figures.

I support this recommendation. Across C&YPS they have, over the course of the past 6 months, already become much more skilled at collating and analysing the relevant data in terms of performance, that has a real impact on the lives of looked after young people. In addition, the 16+ team already maintain this data as part of its normal working practice. Equally, data is already provided on a regular basis to various groups, such as our performance team, education colleagues, department heads and, indeed, to central government. They have also recently included the 16+ performance indicator statistics to their internal performance monitoring meeting, chaired on a monthly basis by the Assistant Director, who would be happy to provide this information to the Scrutiny Panel on a regular basis.

Once again, I thank the Panel for the time and interest in this group of young people, and I look forward to updating the Panel at the six month interval in respect of the on-going progress that the service has made, both in terms of your specific recommendations, and in terms of the general support provided to the young people for whom we are responsible.

Kind regards.

Yours sincerely



Ros Jones
Mayor of Doncaster