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To Mrs Kersten England
CEO
Bradford City Council

Two day formal visit by National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers.

Dear Kersten

Thank you for hosting my visit to Bradford City Council. This letter is the formal feedback following my visit and includes commentary covering the Corporate Governance Model, the Operational Model, the Local Offer and the Care Leavers Feedback. Alongside this I have decided that the recommendations should be considered in a phased approach. I have done this as I appreciate Bradford's intervention programme at present and did not want to put undue pressure on the local authority to improve in a short period of time and would like to offer that I return when each phase is near completion to review progress.

Comments and Points to Consider

As stated in the feedback meeting I was very impressed by the leadership and management approach that was ambitious, aspirational and I got a real sense of passion and commitment to have a better offer for care leavers across the whole service area.

Corporate Governance Model

Bradford have acknowledged they are still on a journey of continuous improvement. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic some developments were halted and rightly so as a new set of challenges emerged for care leavers within lockdown. The local authority are clear what things are now needed to restart the care leavers improvement journey.

The Corporate Parenting Board has gone through significant change and now has a really good buy-in from elected members. The local authority have clearly developed the first strand of the Champion Model Approach that sees Elected Members as a Champion for a Themed area for care leavers that need a real focus on. In strengthening this approach further I would like the local authority to consider three further strands:

1. To ensure that the Portfolio Holder for a themed area sets up Themed Sub Groups that is then chaired by the Elected Member but also has within it operational champions both at decision making and operational level who represent the key themes/agencies that you have identified.
2. To review the Membership of the Board with internal partners and external partners i.e. DWP, mental health, probation, etc.
3. To employ a number of Care Leaver Ambassadors/Champions on a full time basis in the leaving care team to inform and drive the Board, the local offer from each key partner agency and to engage with care leavers up to 25yrs and to represent their views. What should emerge from this approach is that the Board agrees a set of guarantees that care leavers get as part of the local offer.

The local authority should consider a Whole Council Approach. There are three approaches to consider when developing this approach:

1. To review with HR colleagues a Workforce Strategy that 'favours' care leavers i.e. is this vacancy appropriate for a care leaver, is the entry point a barrier and is a guaranteed interview given.
2. To formally ask each department and or commissioned/procured services to make an opportunity offer to care leavers. This could be shadowing, work experience or full time work, etc, or even softer things like the use of direct work vans to move care leavers or an offer of repairs.
3. To consider holding a key partnership event where each partner agency makes explicit their offer to care leavers based on what operational staff and care leavers have said is important to them when services are being delivered. These offers should then be presented to the Corporate Parenting Board on the basis that this is good enough for our own children.

Housing came across as a challenge with references to 'intentionality' still being applied to care leavers, lack of choice and the quality of housing was at times very poor. I would therefore like the LA to consider a review of the current Housing Policy driven by elected members and senior officers to consider:

1. No longer applying 'intentionality' to care leavers and for care leavers to be given priority in allocation.
2. Could Housing Partners develop a standard offer to care leavers when they move into their housing i.e. carpets, a cooker, fridge freezer and a microwave.
3. No care leavers to be offered a property that is not good enough for your own children.

I was also unable to see a health offer for care leavers. The team were working through some very complex behaviours, thresholds and a clear opt-out by mental health. It would be good to see an offer from health around emotional wellbeing and support. Alongside this as part of the offer could the LA offer free prescriptions to care leavers up to 25yrs alongside dental care and eye care for care leavers.

Adult Transitions was described as 'stuck' and there was clear evidence that adult services just 'opt-out' when it comes to care leaver referrals. Care leavers were offered one chance to engage and if they did not they were 'taken off the books'. PA's felt there was no joined up approach and were often overwhelmed with complex paperwork and appeals that led to nothing from adult services.

Therefore I would like the LA to develop two clear pathways to those services above. Within the Adult Social Care Pathway I would like the LA to consider starting discussions around complexity when young people are in care planning and are approaching 14yrs. This would allow early planning and identification of needs especially for care leavers who have complex needs but do not meet a threshold for an intervention as they approach 18yrs olds.

In relation EET I would like the LA to consider a 'whole council approach' by getting the:

1. Virtual School Head to undertake an aspirational audit of all children in care and care leavers.
2. To hold a Business Event to match the aspiration audit to local business' and the community.
3. To get each department in the 'family business' to make an offer or an opportunity/work shawowing to a child in care or a care leaver.
4. To review their HR Workforce Strategy to include care leavers. I heard an example of where a job in the LA states at least 5yrs experience – this automatically excludes care leavers accessing vacancies that could potentially change their lives. Guaranteed interviews should be considered for care leavers with a contextual offer for entry points.
5. The LA to agree a number of ringfenced apprenticeships for care leavers.
6. For care leavers who are in the ringfenced jobs to be given time out of work to meet as a group to support each other be involved in the care leaver forum.
7. To cinsider an incentive scheme for care leavers who are seeking work.
8. A guarantor Scheme would be good to see as this will open up private renting options for care leavers.

The leaving care team have a good relationship with DWP. I would like the LA and DWP to develop or review their JWP to include having a SPOC in the leaving care team, verification of ID issues and advance payments use. The JWP then needs to be presented to the Corporate Parenting Board.

Caseloads and demand seemed good at the moment but it is likely that demand will increase as numbers coming into care have increased over the years but PA numbers in real terms have remained static. Mangers stated that an additional 4 PA's and management support would be needed to level up the next couple of years. The return of the care leaver judgement in the new year by OfSted will have a real focus on caseloads and anything above 22 may be seeing as requiring improvement.

The Operational Model and Local Offer

The operational model comes in at 17yrs which I think is too late. A good model of practice is when the PA is allocated at the point of the first pathway plan around about the care leavers 16th birthday. It is fundamentally crucial that the PA is involved in the first pathway plan with the social worker.

The local offer came across as the basic statutory offer. The local offer was not produced with all Corporate Parenting Partners and signed off by the Board. Although the current offer is compliant with the new legislation its not ambitious or specific enough. In developing the offer I would like to see specific offers to care leavers over 21yrs with a focus on UASC, care leavers entering and leaving custody and care leavers as parents. I would like to see an explicit offer to care leavers going into FE or University and for care leavers who need work ready clothes/work clothes. It would also be good to see an offer of driving lessons, driving test, contents insurance, first TV license, etc.

A Digital Offer should be developed for care leavers – broadband, laptops, mobile data, etc.

Data is well understood and I got a sense that compliance is a large part of the day job. I got the impression that this was changing and that stories are starting to be used as the new data and being far more outcome focused would be a good approach.

The local authority does not have a HUB for care leavers. It would be good for the LA to consider whether a HUB could be developed with a council owned asset with perhaps businesses offering to refurb, carpet, decorate, etc. This would be a great opportunity to co-locate with other services in a one stop type approach.

The LA should consider a set of guarantees as part of the local offer.

Head of Service/Team Managers and PA team meeting

Throughout the day I got a real sense that personal advisers and managers are and want to make things happen for their care leavers.

Other points noted:

- They wanted to be part of the development of a key partner offer to care leavers and to meet with senior managers as they felt at times as they were the silent partner. We have no voice.
- Could we have a care leaver champion in the team.
- The team felt change had happened but at times were not clear if some of the changes were a direct result of what they have said.
 - Could the LA develop an incentive programme for care leavers who are seeking work.
 - PA's talked about everything being a fight and care leavers said the same.
 - I heard of a case example of a care leaver being evicted very soon and she has known this for 3 months but housing have still offered nothing. Managers had picked this up but the responsibility remains with housing who at that moment were not taking responsibility.
 - Taster flats for care leavers to get them ready for independence.

Care Leavers Feedback

I have to say that the feedback was mixed. What they said was:

- Can we have driving lessons after our 21st birthday.
- A leisure Pass with a Plus 1 would be good.
- The housing offer is poor quality.
- Lack of communication across departments – its always a fight
- We are too busy to see you.
- People leave so tell us.
- What are Pathway Plans.
- Can we have mental health support.
- No support from housing.
- They don't trust us.
- Can we have a space of our own – a HUB.
- Can we have access to cash.
- What is suitable accommodation.
- Tell us what are our guarantees.
- Why does the offer stop at 25yrs.
- It really tough being a care leaver and you make it tougher.

Recommendations: I have put these in a staged order:

Stage 1

1. To develop the additional strands as suggested above in the 'Champion Model Approach' and introduce themed Boards.
2. To strengthen the Membership of the Board.
3. To employ Care Leaver Ambassadors/Champions.
4. The Board to agree a set of Guarantees for care leavers.
5. The LA to consider a review of the current Housing Policy driven by elected members and senior officers.
6. The LA to develop two clear pathways to adult transitions and health and for discussions around complexity to begin in care planning when children in care are approaching 14yrs. .
7. To develop a joint DWP Protocol and to present to the Board.

Stage 2

1. The Virtual School Head to undertake an aspirational audit of all children in care and care leavers.
2. To hold a Business Event to match the aspiration audit to local business' and the community.
3. To get each department in the 'family business' to make an offer or an opportunity/work showing to a child in care or a care leaver.
4. To review their HR Workforce Strategy to include care leavers and to develop an offer of Guaranteed interviews with a contextual offer for entry points.
5. The LA to agree a number of ringfenced apprenticeships for care leavers.

Stage 3

13. To consider an incentive scheme for care leavers who are seeking work.
14. To consider whether a guarantor scheme would be a benefit to care leavers.
15. To review current caseloads and to consider whether additional PA's are needed to reduce caseloads.
16. To develop further the health offer 18yrs to 25yrs which could include an offer of dental prostheses and or glasses, etc.

Stage 4

17. To push forward the 16+ Model.
18. To review the local offer and to ensure it has a multi-agency buy-in.
19. To develop a 21yrs to 25yrs offer which includes UASC, care leavers entering and leaving custody and young parents.
20. To develop a digital offer to care leavers.
21. To develop an FE and HEI offer that encourages care leavers to enter education.
- 22.. Could the LA develop an incentive programme for care leavers who are seeking work.
23. To consider the care leavers feedback.

I hope my visit and the feedback/recommendations have been useful and I look forward to seeing you in six months.

M. Riddell MBE

Mark Riddell MBE

