

West Sussex County Council's response to recommendations from West Sussex Joint Scrutiny Task and Finish Group

Housing Provision for Care Leavers Review

Recommendations

A common and flexible policy across the County to be introduced regarding "local connection"

(1) Taking into account the evidence provided during the review and the subsequent guidance on allocation policies across the County provided by the West Sussex Strategic Housing Group, the Task and Finish Group considers that there is sufficient scope within allocation policies across the County to facilitate care leavers securing accommodation in suitable locations for them which in the long term will help them settle quicker and make the transition into independent living easier. This may be within another local authority area. Districts and Boroughs across the County should be proactive in using the scope provided by existing flexibilities within their housing allocation schemes to this end in the spirit of the Joint Protocol launched in November 2015.

This is a recommendation for District and Borough Councils so the County Council is unable to respond.

(2) That when placing Care Leavers into accommodation, Officers in the

District and Borough Councils should ensure that they are aware that certain areas are not suitable for housing of Care Leavers. Avoiding those areas will help Care leavers make that transition into independent living much easier.

The County Council welcomes this initiative and the Care Leavers Service (CLS) will work in partnership with District and Borough Councils to ensure that we jointly assess those young people who may benefit from this flexibility.

Providing Good quality and Consistent support throughout time in Care and sometimes beyond the end of Care

(3) The Task and Finish Group considers that Officers should be encouraged to provide good quality and consistent help and support from an early age and ensure that the same support worker is allocated to a young person in care even if they are moved to a different area.

The County Council ensures continuity of support as far as possible for the young person in care. However, it is not always viable to keep the same support worker for the duration of the young person's time under the care of the Local Authority.

(4) The Task and Finish Group also considers that Care assessment should be based on need rather than age based, realising that some young people need support for much longer than others - Care should not just come to a stop at 18.

Support for Care Leavers ends at 21 and at 25 for those in Further/Higher Education. The above is a priority for the County Council's Children's Service. The County Council's quality assurance process and improvement and oversight by the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) and Multi Agency Children Looked After Group (MACLAIG) drive this. The County Council worked with the Department for Education (DfE) to contribute and influence the new strategy to extend support for Care Leavers to 25. The County Council understands that the DfE, as part of the strategy, will fund the extension of Personal Advisor Support to Care Leavers to the age of 25.

Care Leavers - Policy in West Sussex

(5) That representations be made to the Government requesting that the statutory duty to provide accommodation for Care Leavers by a County Council should be extended to age 21 rather than 18 to provide more flexibility and support for care Leavers and help them in their move to independent living.

This is an un-resourced aspiration and funding would be required to enable the County Council to achieve this.

(6) That West Sussex County Council and the District and Borough Councils work with accommodation providers to provide more communal type living accommodation in West Sussex to help Care leavers into independent living.

The County Council works with providers to ensure sufficiency and to directly commission placements that offer this support.

(7) That West Sussex County Council be requested to amend its Young People's Service provision for Care Leavers to provide support via the Young People's Service from age 16 rather than 18.

The County Council's is currently considering this issue alongside of which, Children's Services will review and consider how the new statutory guidance on support for care leavers that is currently being considered by parliament, will be implemented.

(8) That there should be a universal Care leavers Policy approach across all Councils in West Sussex to assist with co-ordination etc.

This has been achieved through the Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers and will be reviewed in November 2016.

Joint Protocol on Housing Provision for Care Leavers

(9) That Officers from West Sussex County Council ensure that the Joint Protocol is fully implemented as soon as possible and that all Councils are involved in the Pathway Planning meetings and other discussions.

The Joint Protocol highlighted above has achieved this aspiration and will be reviewed in November 2016 with partners.

(10) To help in the implementation of the Protocol it is suggested that all District and Borough Councils should have a named Link Officer responsible for Care leavers in their area, making communication easier and clearer.

The County Council supports this aspiration and notes that good progress is being made in most District and Borough Councils.

Future Monitoring of Housing Provision for Care Leavers

(11) That the Task and Finish Group be retained to meet on a quarterly basis as a Countywide group to oversee the process of housing provision for care leavers and ensure that improvements are being undertaken to the process. If it is not possible to do this via the Joint Scrutiny process then it should be referred through the West Sussex Corporate Parenting Panel.

The CPP and MACLAIG, which reports to CPP, will provide robust oversight of Care Leavers.

Housing Benefit/Universal Credit - Potential Impact on Young People under the age of 21 years who leave Local Authority Care

(12) That Officers continue to monitor the situation and undertake further lobbying if it subsequently proves that young people leaving Local Authority Care are not to be exempted.

The County Council's Young People's Service work closely and meet regularly with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) applying the Joint Protocol arrangements. The County Council ensures that Care Leavers receive their full entitlements. Should Care Leavers no longer be exempt from benefit restrictions on the County Council will work jointly with the District and Borough Council's to lobby and campaign on behalf of our Care Leavers.