## Summary

This report sets out the findings from the Audit of Onwards and Upwards Care Leaver Service completed 2015 that was a follow up to the audit completed by an Independent Auditor in 2014. The audit report was agreed by the service and a subsequent action plan developed to deliver the recommendations and drive forward the changes and best practice requirements already began.

## Recommendations

1. CPAP consider the audit findings and note the recommendations.
2. CPAP consider the action plan and note improvements made
1. **WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED**
   1.1 The service needed to improve its practice and deliver high quality advice, guidance and support to Care Leavers. The service needed to better understand its position and outcomes for this cohort. This report can evidence this challenge was accepted and considerable progress has been made.

2. **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**
   2.1 The recommendations made highlighted the step change and culture change required to influence and drive forward best practice.

3. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED**
   3.1 None proposed

4. **POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION**
   4.1 The action plan evidences the decisions made and sets clear timescales for measurable changes to be made

5. **IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION**
   5.1 **Corporate Priorities and Performance**
      5.1.1 Corporate targets will be ratified
      5.1.2 Performance improvement will be acknowledged
      5.1.3 Outcomes for Care Leavers improved
   5.2 **Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)**
      5.2.1 Staff changes have already been enacted and permanent staff are now in post
      5.2.2 Cost efficiencies will be made as reliance on agency staff is reduced
   5.3 **Legal and Constitutional References**
      5.3.1 Statutory duties will be met by undertaking support and services in required timescales
   5.4 **Risk Management**
      5.4.1 Potential risk reduced as Care Leavers will receive a better service
   5.5 **Equalities and Diversity**
      5.5.1 As above
   5.6 **Consultation and Engagement**
      5.6.1 Care Leavers were consulted upon and their views contained in the body of the report. Care leavers are continually consulted to help shape future service delivery

6. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**
   N/A
Introduction.

In January 2014 an independent audit of the Onwards and Upwards service in Barnet was commissioned by the Assistant Director of Children’s services.

The audit judged the quality of the Onwards and Upwards service against relevant sections of the Ofsted ‘framework and evaluation schedule for the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers’. The intention of that audit was to evaluate the effectiveness and quality of services provided by the Onwards and Upwards (O&U) service.

The 2014 audit examined a large number of documents and had input from care leavers and staff within the service. The outcome of the audit was that the service required improvement in all areas of the Ofsted framework apart from ‘pathway planning’ which was judged inadequate.

The LB Barnet took appropriate action to upgrade the service. The Borough decided, in the spring of 2014, to appoint an external improvement manager to drive the necessary changes through and to improve the service. The outcome of this work was that changes were made to the culture of the service and steps put in place to insure service improvements would be sustainable.

The Assistant Director for Children’s Services then commissioned this second audit of the service ‘one year on’ to see if the changes made by the LB Barnet were the correct ones and to ensure that the service was improving. This audit took place in March 2015, onsite from the 17-19 March and used the same Ofsted framework as the 2014 audit.

Methodology.

A wide range of documents were provided before the auditor came on site. These include evidence of the change process being overseen at a senior level, documents showing new protocols and polices and procedures as well as documents created in response to the 2014 audit recommendations.

Whilst on site

- 18 case files, selected by the auditor, were examined.
- 12 O&U staff were seen, some alone and some in groups.
- The Improvement Manager was interviewed.
- The Assistant Director was interviewed.
• 3 Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) were spoken to.
• 6 care leavers using the service were interviewed and 6 were spoken to on the phone.
• The two Team Managers of the O&U service were interviewed.
• The Interim Head of Service was interviewed.
• The Data and Performance Officer was interviewed.
• The Looked After Children (LAC) nurse was interviewed.
• The Business Support Officer was interviewed.
• The Children’s Rights Officer was interviewed.
• The Targeted Youth Officer and the DWP worker based at the centre were interviewed.

Summary.

The overall judgement of the quality of the service is that:

The service requires improvement but has good features and is good in six of the ten standards.

The management changes taken by Barnet were the right ones and the service is on a trajectory to be a good service. It cannot yet be judged as good, primarily due to the fact that outcomes of the changes taken are not yet seen by the users of the service. This is inevitable when such an approach is taken to drive change. Steps and processes have been put in place to change the culture of the team. The 2014 audit reported that the morale of the O&U practitioners was low. The 2015 audit found morale to be high and there is a positive feeling of hope for the future of the service and a real desire and ambition to ensure care leavers using the service receive the best possible service. Management is strong and leadership effective.

Detailed report.

1. Care leavers are safe and feel safe, particularly where they are living, and are helped to understand how their life choices will affect their safety and well-being. Any risks associated with offending, drug or alcohol misuse, going missing or with sexual exploitation are known by adults who have a responsibility for them and effective plans are in place to reduce the risk of or actual harm to them. Care leavers are supported to take responsibility for their behaviour.

Judgement: Requires improvement. Judgement in 2014: Requires improvement

Risk assessments were seen on all care leaver’s files. However the use and quality of the assessments is variable. Some staff are unclear how they should be used, what they are for
and how often they should be reviewed. In one file there is a possible risk to staff posed by a care leaver. The risk however would only be seen if the risk assessment was looked at. The risk should have been flagged on the front page of the electronic case file so that staff on duty would immediately see it.

Staff have not received training on drug and alcohol misuse. This was a recommendation at the previous audit and as data on care leaver’s health needs shows a high use of drugs and alcohol this recommendation should have been followed through. Another recommendation from 2014 was that child protection training should be undertaken by all staff. Child protection training was undertaken by all staff and caseloads adjusted to ensure that all high risk cases were allocated to suitably qualified and experienced workers or cases joint worked. However it is acknowledged that this was at an inappropriate level for some staff who undertook the course and was not specific to the risks care leavers present.

Parallel planning and contingency planning for unaccompanied asylum seeking care leavers is in place for some young people and could be more robust in others to prevent risks of offending, exploitation and to ensure that young people do not go underground as a result of a negative decision by the home office

Whilst there appears to be an improvement in the frequency of visits to care leavers made by social workers and PAs, an indicative estimate provided showed that 47 have not been seen in the last twelve months. This is not acceptable.

One care leaver placed out of the borough has not been seen since November. He is difficult to engage. However he is obviously at risk of physical harm and he has now become a father. Steps need to be taken to ensure care leavers out of borough are seen regularly and helped to apply for college courses, employment etc. A thematic audit has been undertaken to ensure that such young people have been identified, there is evidence of the voice of the young person and management oversight

Work is underway to improve the service but at present this cannot be judged as being good.

Recommendations

- **Staff undertake regular training in drug and alcohol use at a level appropriate to their needs.**
- **Staff undertake safeguarding training at a level appropriate to their needs and specific to the needs of care leavers.**
- **The frequency of contact for all care leavers should be increased.**
- **The risk assessment process is reviewed to ensure it is ‘user friendly’ and flags up risks and following this review staff are trained in its use.**
- **Contingency and parallel planning should be in place for all young people seeking asylum before they receive a home office decision over their right to remain in the UK.**
2. Pathway planning is effective and plans (including transition planning for looked after children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities) address all young people’s needs and are updated as circumstances change.


Much work has been undertaken to improve the quality of pathway plans. However data provided showed that 17% of all pathway plans are not completed within the timescale set. The audit in 2014 recommended that the ISC format of plans is reviewed as a matter of urgency. This review has taken place and has appropriately involved staff completing the plan, IROs and care leavers. However it has not been given sufficient priority and the new format is not yet fully tested and is not to be available until May. This is still therefore a recommendation.

Care leavers do not like the existing format of pathway plans and find them to be a bit irrelevant to their lives as they are too ‘technical’ (their words).

There are written standards set down for the completion of pathway plans. Staff are challenged by managers if pathway plans do not meet these standards. This is an improvement from 2014. The quality of plans has improved but there is still some variability in the quality, mainly due to staff not being sure about how to complete a plan on the ICS system. Dates on plans are not always completed accurately, for example some showed as being completed before they were started. This may have implications for the quality of management information being completed.

Whilst there are written standards for the completion of pathway plans the written guidance does not state that care leavers must be allowed to comment on the plan and add their own comments if they wish. There is no evidence of care leavers reading and understanding their plan. Knowledge gained from these comments could be used to take forward service improvement. All plans are sent to care leavers but no record on file to say if they agree or understand the plan. These are the care leavers’ plans, it is vital they own them.

IROs commented that on the whole the quality of plans had improved and they had not raised any alerts in relation to the quality of plans for the last three months. IROs had reviewed all cases where pathway planning had not commenced and now all cases have plans.

Recommendations

- review and amend as a priority the current ICS format to ensure that it enables consistent SMART planning including standardised measurement of outcomes, visibility of the views of care leavers, easy reference to previously agreed pathway plans, better integration with care plans and less duplication (from the last audit).
• Once the new format has been introduced ensure all staff receive regular training in the completion of the new plans.
• Staff need support to ensure all care leavers have a copy of their plan and their comments about the plan are appropriately recorded on ICS. These comments should be aggregated and used as a learning tool for service development.

3. The health needs of care leavers are clearly assessed, prioritised and met. Child and adolescent mental health services, adult mental health provision, therapeutic help and services for learning or physically disabled young people and adults are available when they are needed.


Since the previous audit a thorough health needs analysis has been undertaken which clearly demonstrates the main health issues facing care leavers. Effective contact by the LAC nurse with adult health provision is assisting smoother transitions for care leavers who require continuing health care.

Care leavers are registered with a GP and they commented that they are receiving good health care when needed.

It might be helpful if the LAC nurse had more of a presence in the O&U team and raised the profile of the importance of healthcare as on some files seen health did not appear to take the same priority as other issues such as housing and education or work. This is being arranged as part of the inclusion of agencies being co-located at O&U.

It would also be helpful to care leavers and health service providers if the health needs of those care leavers with a known health need in adult life were discussed earlier with adult health providers so that adult health provision could be arranged earlier and more appropriately. This especially applies to care leavers placed out of the borough where local health providers need to know future demands.

Recommendations

• The LAC nurse is helped to engage more fully with the staff of onwards and upwards.
• That consideration is given to alerting health care providers earlier when a care leaver has a known health need that is going to continue into adult life.

4. Care leavers have access to and understand their full health history and are provided with all key documents they need to begin their lives as young adults, for example national insurance numbers, birth certificates and passports.

Since the last audit in 2014 a ‘health passport’ has been designed. All young people new to the care leaving process have theirs completed by the LAC nurse to a good standard. However young people already in the leaving care system have either had their passport completed by a member of care staff or been asked to complete one themselves. Not all care leavers have completed theirs. Care leavers spoken to seem to be unaware of the existence of these ‘passports’. They either do not have one or do not realise what it is.

There is a layout problem with the passport and it is not possible to put detailed health information on the actual document so the LAC nurse has to give the care leaver a separate piece of paper if the health history is detailed. This increases the risk of it being lost or damaged as a health passport is something a care leaver should be able to keep for life.

Recommendations

- The health passport is revised with more space
- Work is undertaken to ensure all young people leaving care have a completed health passport, completed by a health professional.

5. Care leavers develop the skills and confidence they need to maximise their chances of successful maturity to adulthood, including parenthood. This includes learning to budget, to live independently and to manage safe relationships and behaviour. Care leavers form and maintain relationships with carers and staff from the local authority and develop supportive relationships within the community, including where appropriate contact with family and friends. They are confident that the local authority will act as a reasonable parent in supporting their transition into adulthood and providing practical, emotional and financial support until they are at least 21 and, where necessary, until they are 25. This will include the availability of a trusted and known adult (for example, the allocated personal adviser or their social worker) to support them.


The work to improve the quality of the service in the longer term has created a high turnover of staff and all care leavers spoken to say this is the main problem of the service. Some say they have virtually given up using O&U it as every time they contact it they found their worker has changed. All care leavers spoke of the need they have to build a trusting relationship with a member of staff. The turnover has prevented this happening for some, leading to dis-engagement by care leavers from the service. One care leaver said she had suffered from high turnover of staff but now had someone she has known for a while and she says she is ‘brilliant and like a real friend’. This statement shows the impact a lower
turnover can have. A survey of young people evidenced that young people were more satisfied with the service but that there was still more to do in this area.

Staff from other services who work with care leavers also reported that staff turnover is the main problem faced by care leavers. Care leavers spoke of having to ‘tell their story’ again and again. This lack of engagement may lead to an increase of risk of safety for care leavers who are not keeping in touch and not using the service.

Social workers and PAs are working with cases that have been transferred to them when other staff in the team have left and they sometimes do not seem to know much about the case.

Communication to care leavers could have been better. Some were not aware their social worker or PA had left until they rang and asked for them. They should have been made aware and told who their new worker was.

Now the new structure of the team is coming into being there is an opportunity for more stability and better communication with care leavers.

Recommendations

- Improve communication with individual care leavers and ensure they know who their worker is and if the worker is leaving in the near future what plan is in place to ensure the care leaver has a replacement.
- Continue to work to reduce the turnover of staff in the service.
- Ensure there is good handover of cases transferred within the team so that the care leaver does not have to tell their story more than once.
- Pictures of staff placed in the waiting area would help (this is a recommendation from a care leaver).

6. Care leavers succeed in their transition to greater independence and adulthood at a time that is right for them. Young people aged 16 and 17 are encouraged to remain looked after until their 18th birthday where (and this will usually be the case) this is in their best interest. They can remain in placements beyond their 18th birthday or, where more appropriate, live in permanent and affordable accommodation that meets their needs and those of their children, where relevant.


There is no evidence that care leavers are not encouraged to stay on in suitable accommodation, to undertake appropriate further or higher education. One care leaver,
who had a need, is using the ‘drop in’ past his eligible age. This is commended as whilst
there is a plan to reduce his dependency on the drop in he is not ready for this yet. Care
leavers are encouraged to live in permanent accommodation and are enjoying relative
stability in their transition. 97% of care leavers placed in the borough are in suitable
accommodation.

It would be appropriate however if the age at which transfer from the child in care team to
O&U is reviewed as most staff and care leavers feel 17 years and 9 months is too late. Care
leavers are very vulnerable around their 18th birthday, facing being an adult and to have a
sometimes desperate scrabble for resources undertaken by staff who may not really know
the care leaver is not good practice.

Recommendation

- Review the age at which care leavers are transferred from the children in care
teams to O&U. This review to include care leavers and staff in both teams along
with the IRO service, the Role Model Army and Children’s Rights Officer.

7. Care leavers have access to appropriate education and employment opportunities,
including work experience and apprenticeships. They are encouraged and supported to
continue their education and training, including those aged 21 to 24 years. Care leavers
are progressing well and achieving their full potential through life choices, either in their
attainment in further and higher education or in their chosen career/occupation

Judgement: Good. Judgement in 2014: requires improvement

Locating a member of staff from the DWP in the team has been widely welcomed by care
leavers and staff. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has visited the scheme and
the service also won the Gold Winner in the Innovation Category in the Quarter 2 DWP
Excellence Awards. Other areas are now looking to follow the way Barnet is working in this
way and reference has been made in the National Care Leavers Strategy. 25 care leavers
have been found jobs over the last year. The percentage of care leavers in employment,
education or training has however remained at 57%. This could show an increase in the
future as the joint working creates greater impact. The targeted youth officer role has
similarly been really effective in engaging care leavers. This role is about to change and will
be substituted by support from a specific Caseworker in the Virtual School who will have
responsibility for young peoples education up to the age of 25 years.

8. Care leavers are positive about themselves. Their achievements are celebrated and the
local authority shows they are positive and proud of their care leavers.
Staff at O&U are respectful of care leavers and enjoy their success. There have been achievement days. Staff turnover has not helped as it is always better to be told ‘well done’ by someone who knows you well and who knows the efforts gone through to succeed but care leavers I spoke to are proud of what they had achieved and have confidence in what they are doing in their lives.

9. Care leavers are helped to find housing solutions that best meet their needs. Risks of tenancy breakdown are identified and alternative plans are in place.

Judgment: Good. Judgement in 2014: requires improvement

10. Accommodation for care leavers is appropriate for each young person to safely develop their independence skills. Houses of multiple occupancy are only used when it is a young person’s preferred option and it can demonstrably be shown to be in their best interests.

Judgement: Good. Judgement in 2014: requires improvement

Since the 2014 audit excellent partnership working between the housing and O&U services in Barnet has resulted in an effective protocol that is impacting positively on care leavers placed in the borough. It is used and is successful. The percentage placed on suitable accommodation has risen to 97%. This is commendable. It may be interesting to examine further whether care leavers placed out of borough also receive such a good service.

11. Care leavers are provided with information (including through the care leaver’s pledge) about their legal entitlements such as access to their records, assistance to find employment (including work experience), training, financial support and how to complain where necessary supported by an advocate.

Judgement: Requires improvement. Judgement in 2014: requires improvement

There is a lengthy document entitled ‘Preparation for Adult life’. Some of it is used to give ideas about budgeting for care leavers. It is too long, too complex and not helpful. Nearly all care leavers spoken with said they would appreciate more clear written guidance about entitlements to money, tenancies, colleges etc. One worker was imaginatively googling information for one of the care leavers on her caseload; this is however time consuming and access to written information should be readily available to staff to give to care leavers.
The Barnet pledge for care leavers is well written and promises a good service. The pledge states that ‘we will give you information that you need about preparing to leave care presented in a way that you want’. This part of the pledge has yet to be met. The 2014 audit recommended ‘review the ICS format to ensure that key pieces of ID information can be easily located in one place on the file and similarly that a simple dated record shows when information has been given on how to make a complaint and subject access to file record requests’. This has not been implemented and is repeated below.

Recommendations

- To produce appropriate information that is readily available to care leavers presented in a way that the care leaver wants.
- To review the ICS format to ensure that key pieces of information can be easily located in one place on the file and similarly that a simple dated record shows when information has been given on how to make a complaint and subject access to file record requests. (repeated from 2014)

Management


The 2014 audit was undertaken at the request of the LB Barnet. The outcome was agreed and since then strong leadership from senior managers of LB Barnet has led to far reaching changes in the team delivering the service for care leavers. The culture had to change, and it has. The service is going in the right direction and with continued support from the council should achieve its aim to deliver a good service for care leavers.

A recommendation from the 2014 audit was to ‘improve team dynamics’. This major piece of work has occurred. Morale is now high; in 2014 it was reported as low. Staff are positive about the future of the service and are all dedicated to improve the service offered to the young people. It is a good team to join.

Staff receive good, high quality, and regular supervision. This was another of the recommendations from 2014. Work is regularly audited by managers and quality is improving. Evidence of those audits is on file.

Cases transferred from the children in care teams are now audited by managers and, if they are not of sufficient quality sent back to the children in care team for further work. This is welcomed by the O&U staff as it means they now have accurate information on the care leavers they are expected to work with.
The turnover of staff, however, has been and still is very unsettling for care leavers and staff. This report mentions above how care leavers are ‘disengaged’ from the service due to the turnover of staff. It is now time to ask care leavers to become involved in the future design of the service. It is also important to make the slowing down of the turnover of staff a priority.

Lead roles have been given to staff and these are working well.

The 2014 recommended that work be undertaken to ensure PAs do not carry complex cases that should be carried by social workers. This has taken place but there is nothing in writing to help managers and staff decide what ‘complex’ looks like.

Management information is still not accurate and needs further urgent work to ensure that by 1 April senior managers have a set of indicators and data they can rely on to check the progress is maintained. The service is aware of this problem and is working on it.

It maybe useful for the management information to show the quality of service provided to care leavers placed out of the borough and be able to compare that for those placed in the borough.

Senior managers are aware of the risks ahead. At the time when the LB Barnet transfers to a new structure in April the O&U service will lose some capacity as the improvement manager role is being appropriately concluded following this audit. Senior managers of the LB Barnet have steps in place to ensure the O&U team manager is adequately supported in her role as she continues to drive forward important and necessary improvements with her team.

**Recommendations**

- Involve care leavers in the future design of the service.
- Immediately ensure management information on the Data Dashboard Assurance report is accurate, thereby ensuring senior managers of the LB of Barnet can oversee the continued improvement of the service.
- Ensure the team manager has sufficient support over the next few crucial months of further change so that she can remain focused on improving the quality of the service for care leavers.
- Create written criteria to clarify the different complexity of cases work carried by a PA and a social worker.