



Department
for Education

Department for Education
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6th September 2022

To Ms Jo Walker
CEO
North Somerset Council

Follow up visit by National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers.

Dear Jo

Thank you for hosting my follow up visit on 6 September. During the follow up visit I heard about the rapid progress you have made to your offer to care leavers since my two day visit. As stated in the feedback meeting I was very impressed by the leadership and management approach to have a better offer for care leavers across the whole service area. What I also saw and heard was many examples where I felt the service was 'pitching' above good and that the whole approach and in particular the team approach stood out with workers who were highly responsive to the needs of care leavers. The local authority are in a good position to get to being great for care leavers. I have therefore made a number of further recommendations that will go some way in strengthening your offer to care leavers. These are my comments on progress and further recommendations:

1. The local authority accepted all of my recommendations and have made huge progress in implementing them.
2. There is a really strong buy-in from elected members and senior officers within the Corporate Parenting Board and the impact is being seen by them acting as Corporate Parenting Champions.
3. The Board has a real focus on the issues faced by both children in care and care leavers.
4. Partnership arrangements are strong in some areas whereas other areas need further development for example:
 - Housing – I would like the LA to consider a quota system for care leavers and a standardised housing starter pack which should include carpets and white goods for care leavers (possible use of VOID's monies).
 - Health – this came across as a developing partnership. I would like to see the ICB as part of their offer giving free prescriptions up to 25 for those ineligible for them.
 - Transitions – again this came across as a developing partnership. A stronger buy-in is needed from Adult Services around earlier planning for care leavers and a favoured approach for care leavers below thresholds.

5. The LA has worked very hard to get 'A Whole Council Approach'. Some opportunities in the 'family business' are been offered. It would be good to see the following things being considered to further strengthen your approach and your EET figure and to compliment your exceptional approach and joint working with Eclipse and ReBoot:
 - An offer from each department in the LA and for salary, etc to be made explicit and a commitment to ring-fencing a number of apprenticeship/ internships within the council
 - To consider the use of vacancies as an offer to care leavers.
 - Care Leavers to be given priority in the Apprenticeship Strategy – currently being developed.
6. The local offer is good but to further enhance the offer I would like the LA to pull out your guarantees to care leavers so that these can be accessed easily and for PA's to fully understand whats on offer. Within this it would be good to see a discreet offer to care leavers 21yrs to 25yrs, UASC, care leavers entering and leaving custody and for young parents.
7. Additional capacity has made a huge difference in your offer coming in sooner at 17yrs old for care leavers but it would be good to see if this could be reviewed and come in at 16yrs old when the first pathway plan is being developed.

And finally in the meeting with your care leavers they stated that things had certainly changed but there is still more to do. In particular they stated:

1. More mental health support.
2. Better communication about whats on offer.
3. Cost of living is tough.
4. Post 21yrs offer would be good.

Overall what I heard and saw is a good offer to care leavers and I look forward to seeing you again in the future

M. Riddell MBE

Mark Riddell MBE

National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers