

<b>Report of:</b>	Councillor Mieka Smiles, Deputy Mayor and Executive Member for Children's Services Sue Myers, Interim Executive Director of Children's Services
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<b>Submitted to:</b>	Executive
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<b>Date:</b>	24 January 2023
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<b>Title:</b>	Children's Services Improvement Programme: Update Report
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<b>Report for:</b>	Information
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<b>Status:</b>	Public
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<b>Strategic priority:</b>	Children and young people
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<b>Key decision:</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Why:</b>	Report is for information only
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<b>Urgent:</b>	No
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<b>Why:</b>	
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### **Executive summary**

The most recent Ofsted monitoring visit (report published December 22) focused on older looked after children and the support offered to care leavers. The report was balanced and provided clarity on the areas we need to improve.

We have already acted on some of the issues raised by inspectors and have added several further actions to the improvement plan.

## **Purpose**

1. To brief members of the Executive on the progress made against the Children's Service Improvement Plan with particular reference to the findings of Middlesbrough's Ofsted Monitoring Visit in November 2022.

## **Background and relevant information**

2. Since the last inspection, services for older children in care and care leavers has started to improve. Most older children who are approaching leaving care are supported to develop the necessary independence skills needed to live alone. Care leavers told inspectors that most of them had experienced a positive transition from care, including that they had been well supported by their social workers and their personal advisors.
3. However, for some children the transition planning has not been as effective as it should have been. As a result, a small number of care leavers described: feeling rushed when moving out of care and a small number this has resulted in them remaining CIC, post 18 due to a lack of planning & we've continued to support them in accommodation. Some young people said they needed more financial support to enable them to buy food and pay their energy bills. We have some plans in place to make sure the right level of support is in place.
4. We maintain contact with most children and care leavers on a regular basis, and care leavers make use of the dedicated social media messenger page to stay in touch. Independent advocates are offered to children and care leavers, and they have been actively involved in supporting them with their issues and concerns.
5. Pathway plans vary in quality. Most plans require tighter target setting/ Smarter focus. The better plans and assessments include the clear voice of the child and care leaver and are written to them. This means that children and care leavers are very clear about their rights and entitlements.
6. Contingency planning is mostly absent or entirely focused on the breakdown of living arrangement rather than a holistic view of the child and young person and their circumstances.
7. Those children and care leavers who benefit from the supported living accommodation and the bespoke children's home are well supported to prepare for independent living. Staff provide them with opportunities to develop life skills and promote resilience in preparation for living alone. It is clear that they have established trusting relationships with support staff who are attuned to their needs. It is a real positive that those children and care leavers who talked to inspectors, and who live in these homes, are all either in education or are in work.
8. Return home interviews after children have been missing are undertaken in a timely way and information from the child or care staff provides a helpful insight to understand risk. Children have appropriate safety plans and oversight from the vulnerable exploited missing and trafficked panel. Consequently, children had reduced their missing episodes as well as their risks in the community.

9. The pathways team do not always demonstrate sufficient curiosity and challenge about the care leaver’s holistic needs. Managers acknowledge this is an area for development. Some of the newer members of the team do not receive the frequency of supervision and type of support that they would benefit from to develop themselves and progress their understanding of the work.

While most personal advisors talk enthusiastically about their care leavers, and describe ‘stickability’ with them, this is not always translating into direct action which is promoting young people’s safeguarding and well-being. Risk for some care leavers is not always recognised in a timely.

### Next Steps

- As a result of the monitoring visit, we have made the following changes to the improvement plan. A focused audit will take place in March 2023 to check on the progress of the changes.

<p>For some children the transition planning has not been as effective as it should have been. As a result, a small number of care leavers described: feeling rushed when moving out of care; not having sufficient understanding of their living costs; that they needed more financial support to enable them to buy food and pay their energy bills; and help with new deposits and bonds when their housing situation broke down.</p>	<p>Ofsted monitoring visit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hot topics to be held in January 2023 on preparing for adulthood including budgeting, housing choices</li> <li>• Gather feedback from young people to understand the impact of their transition plan and how this could be improved from their perspective. (January 23)</li> <li>• Adults Social Care and Housing have agreed to start working with young people who require their support from the age of 17 years to support a seamless transition to adulthood</li> <li>• Review the support we offer to care leavers and look at other ways we can help with the cost of living/ food bills etc. (explore shared tenancies/friends living together etc.) (January 23)</li> </ul>
<p>Most plans require tighter target setting.</p>	<p>Ofsted monitoring visit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer audit sessions are being completed with Team Managers, Social Workers, and Personal Advisor’s monthly to review and support the quality of Needs Assessments and Pathway Plans</li> <li>• Training led by the PSW jointly with Team Managers focusing on how to carry out a good quality Needs Assessment and Pathway Plan in January 2023</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake an audit to review the quality of Needs Assessments and Pathway Plans in March 2023</li> </ul>
Contingency planning is mostly absent or entirely focused on the breakdown of living arrangement rather than a holistic view of the child and young person and their circumstances.	Ofsted monitoring visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hot topics session to be held focusing on contingency planning in January 2023.</li> <li>Undertake an audit to review Pathway Plans to review to ensure contingency planning is effectively considered in March 2023.</li> </ul>
We have recently introduced a passport to independence. However, this is too soon to show impact on delivering a consistently robust preparation for independence for all children.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake evaluation of the success of the passport to independence in May 2023.</li> <li>Undertake an audit to review consistent application of the passport to independence.</li> <li>Gather feedback from young people in relation to their experience and usefulness of the passport to independence.</li> <li>If required, make changes to the process to improve the passport to independence.</li> </ul>
The development of the sufficiency strategy, and the children's forecasting model which underpins this, has lacked the necessary pace to secure sufficiency of local internal placements for children in care.	Ofsted monitoring visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish working group to focus on sufficiency and forecasting</li> <li>Review current sufficiency strategy and action plan to ensure it is fit for purpose and make amendments informed by local data and intelligence.</li> </ul>
Care leavers who are in custody do not always receive a good enough service. This was also seen by inspectors on this visit.	Ofsted monitoring visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review joint working agreement in place with Youth Justice and Children's Care to ensure it is being applied consistently. (January 23)</li> <li>Head of Service/ Service Manager to approach prisons with a view to strengthening relationships and creating some shares outcomes by January 2023.</li> <li>Head of Service for Pathways to work with Head of Service for YOS to review processes in place with probation to ensure care experienced young people leaving custody, who are 18 years and above, are offered appropriate support by February 2023.</li> <li>We are delivering targeted staff development including Awareness Raising on Care Leavers in Custody, Hot Topics (19th Dec) and wider staff training on Young People in Custody.</li> <li>Principle Social Worker to develop Practice Standards for Children in Custody by February 2023.</li> <li>We will re-audit this cohort of young people to evaluate the impact of these improvements in February 2023</li> </ul>

<p>Care leavers benefit from the Middlesbrough care leaver offer including council tax exemptions. However, council tax exemption is only applicable if care leavers live in Middlesbrough putting those who live away from their home area at a disadvantage. Additionally, some care leavers told inspectors that they were struggling with the cost of living.</p>	<p>Ofsted monitoring visit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of a regional care leaver's offer to ensure consistent support is provided regardless of a young person's location within the region. Claire S to take to AD's group in February 2023.</li> <li>• Service Manager for Care Leavers to explore ideas to offer more support to our care leavers around the cost of living, to commence in January 2023.</li> </ul>
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**Rationale for the recommended decision(s)**

10. The action plan above sets out our response to the letter from Ofsted. The rationale being that we will need to demonstrate that we have taken action following the monitoring.

**Other potential decision(s) and why these have not been recommended**

11. There are no other potential decisions, we have been guided by Ofsted inspectors on the areas for improvement.

**Impact(s) of the recommended decision(s)**

***Legal***

12. There are no legal implications at this stage.

***Strategic priorities and risks***

13. The changes will be added to our existing improvement plan

***Human Rights, Equality and Data Protection***

14. NA

***Financial***

15. There are no financial implications at this stage. The plan will focus on improving practice within our current budget.

## Actions to be taken to implement the recommended decision(s)

Action	Responsible Officer	Deadline
<a href="#">To implement the action plan</a>	Sue Myers/Claire Sowerby	March 2023

## Appendices

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## Background papers

Body	Report title	Date
Ofsted	Monitoring visit letter	December 10 2023

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