

Suffolk Social Care

Good Practice In Children's Services

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1 Aims and Objectives

- 1.1 This policy states the commitment of Suffolk County Council (hereafter referred to as "The Council") to the philosophy, aims and objectives of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 (hereafter referred to as "The Act"). It forms part of an interlocking group of plans and policies that state the Council's commitment to modernisation and social inclusion. Specifically, it recognises that young people, as they leave care have a diversity of needs, based on background, age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and any disability they may have. Those working with these young people, or advocating on their behalf, are expected to support pro-actively their human rights, including their right to equal opportunities, through anti-discriminatory practice.
- 1.2 The Council endorses and supports the main purpose of the Act, to improve the life chances of young people living in and leaving local authority care. It endorses and supports the main aims of the Act.
- 1.2.1 to delay young people's discharge from care until they are prepared and ready to leave
 - 1.2.2 to improve the assessment, preparation and planning for leaving care
 - 1.2.3 to provide better personal support for young people after leaving care
 - 1.2.4 to improve the financial arrangements for care leavers
- 1.3 This policy should be read and understood in conjunction with other plans and policies that are aimed at improving services for children and families. These include:-
- 1.3.1 the Quality Protects Management Action Plan
 - 1.3.2 the Joint Policy for the Education of Children and Young People in the Care of Suffolk County Council
 - 1.3.3 Suffolk ACPC Joint Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Children
 - 1.3.4 The Framework for Assessment of Children in Need and their Families: Inter-agency Protocol and Guidance
- 1.4 The Council's aims and objectives for children who are looked after, and those leaving care are as follows:-

- 1.4.1 to provide stable placements, continuity of carers and the maintenance, wherever possible, of positive links, whilst young people are looked after.
- 1.4.2 to look after young people until they are prepared and ready to leave care.
- 1.4.3 to promote and maintain relationships with carers and families, where possible, after young people leave care.
- 1.4.4 to prepare young people gradually to be ready to leave care, paying attention to practical self-care needs - health, budgeting, domestic skills - and personal and relationship dimensions.
- 1.4.5 to enable young people leaving care to fulfil their potential in education, training and employment
- 1.4.6 to ensure young people leaving care have access to a range of accommodation and the support and skills to maintain them in their accommodation.
- 1.4.7 to ensure that there is contingency provision to support care leavers in the event of a crisis, including arrangements for respite care.
- 1.4.8 to provide or enable ongoing personal support, including support from the leaving care project, support by carers and social workers and support by youth workers, befrienders, mentors, or volunteers. This is underlined by the introduction of personal advisers under the Act.
- 1.4.9 to ensure that where young people are entitled to claim welfare benefits, they receive their full entitlements
- 1.4.10 to involve young people in all assessment, planning, reviews and decision making arrangements, for leaving care
- 1.4.11 to inform young people leaving care of the available services including provision of accessible leaving care guides and of their right to access their own records.
- 1.4.12 to monitor and evaluate the outcomes of the above

- 1.5 In support of these aims and objectives the Council is committed to Quality Protects Objective 5, to ensure that young people leaving care, as they enter adulthood, are not isolated and participate socially and economically as citizens. It is also committed to the sub-objectives
- 1.5.1 to ensure that young people who were in care when they were sixteen are studying, training or working when they are nineteen.
 - 1.5.2 to ensure that Social Care Services are still in touch with people aged nineteen who were in care aged sixteen
 - 1.5.3 to maximise the proportion of young people who were looked after aged sixteen in suitable accommodation aged nineteen
- 1.6 The Council is committed to relevant targets in the NHS plan:
- 1.6.1 to improve the levels of education, training and employment outcomes for care leavers aged nineteen, so that levels for this group are at least 75 percent of those achieved by all young people in the county by March 2004
 - 1.6.2 To improve the educational attainment of children and young people in care by increasing to 15 per cent in 2004 the proportion of children leaving care aged sixteen and over with at least five GCSE's grade A to C

2 Principles, Values and Aspirations

- 2.1 The Council recognises that the needs of children as they leave care will not be met by support of single agencies working in isolation, and will depend upon good inter agency liaison and practice. This policy has been drafted by a Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 Implementation Group, involving representatives of all agencies with an interest in care leavers, including Social Care Services, Education, Local Housing Authorities, Connexions and the voluntary sector. Members of the Council re-affirm their role as corporate parents of children and young people who are looked after. Officers of the council are expected to request the help of partner agencies in the discharge of their responsibilities under the Act , using the rights laid out in Section 27 Children Act 1989, that any such request is bound to be complied with if it is compatible with (the other's agency's) own statutory or other duties and obligations, and does not unduly prejudice the discharge of any of their functions.
- 2.2 The Council fully endorses the need for consultation with members of the public, including service users, in the development of effective policy and procedure. A sub-group of the Social Care Management Board takes a lead on these issues, and representatives from this group attend a Corporate Consultation Group. Consultations in the period 1997-2000 had the aim of improving support for young people leaving care, and used the methodology of individual interviews with a sample of care leavers followed by a range of conferences and meetings with members and senior managers in Social Care Services. Additional resources were developed to meet needs that were identified and were awarded with Beacon status. The views of a current sample of care leavers have contributed to the design of services that will meet the requirements of the Act.
- 2.3 The Council affirms that young people will continue to be consulted and involved in the design and review of all services for care leavers, including systems for emotional support, accommodation, finance, health, employment, training, education and recreational activities. Young people will be fully consulted in planning for their individual futures, and the services and support mechanisms to be provided. The decision making process will allow at all times for the full involvement and contribution from the young person, and take account of the pace of change and implementation appropriate to the young person.
- 2.4 As the consultation strategy develops the Council will seek opportunities to consult the views of parents and carers of young people leaving care. They have a significant role to play in meeting

the needs of care leavers, and will be consulted in every appropriate case when individual pathway plans are being drawn up.

- 2.5 The Council will provide an accessible and easy to read guide for young people when they leave care, that will include information on services provided by the Council and by other agencies.
- 2.6 The Council will undertake a major review of this policy within three years of the implementation of the Act that is by October 2004.
- 2.7 Disabled young people may well face more barriers than other young people who are being cared for or leaving care and may also have needs specifically related to impairment. These must be met in Pathway Plans and after care services.

- 2.7.1 Social Care Services will take into account any transition plan drawn up under the SEN Code of Practice.
- 2.7.2 Social Care Services has a duty to assist the Education Department with the provision of services to any young person who is subject to a statement of Special Education Needs.
- 2.7.3 Disabled young people may have specific housing needs, which should be included in inter agency liaison when they are preparing to leave care, in the context of housing authority obligations to give priority to vulnerable groups such as disabled young people.
- 2.7.4 Other relevant legislation is to be considered alongside the Act in planning for disabled care leavers. This includes the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representatives) Act 1986, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 the Community Care (Direct Payments) Act 1996 and the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000. For young people with a learning disability the Learning and Skills Act 2000 and the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 apply.
- 2.7.5 Direct payments can play a useful part in preparing a disabled 16 or 17 year old for the responsibilities of adulthood and can continue after the age of 18 under the Community Care (Direct Payments) Act 1996. In appropriate cases the personal adviser will work with the Suffolk Direct Payments Scheme to facilitate this.
- 2.8 The preparation of young people for leaving care will be achieved by the comprehensive use of the Looking After Children documents and Core Assessment Records, and driven by a strong Performance and Review Team. Practitioners working with children who are looked after are expected to focus on the three broad aspects of preparation for leaving care.

- 2.8.1 Young people should be enabled to build and maintain relationships with others, both general and sexual relationships. When a young person leaves care he or she should have a supportive network of friends, many of who will be from outside the care system.
- 2.8.2 Young people should be enabled to develop their self esteem. Young people should know about their family background and cultural identity, and the reasons they came to be looked after and able to accept themselves intellectually and emotionally.
- 2.8.3 Young people should be taught practical skills and knowledge, to be able to look after themselves as they move towards independence.
- 2.9 There is an expectation that this policy will result in greater stability of placements for young people over sixteen, who are looked after, and an increase in the average age at which young people leave care after sixteen.
- 2.10 Every young person aged sixteen or over who is looked after by the local authority will have a Pathway Plan, drawn up to guidelines that are consistent with regulations. The Pathway Plan will be based on a needs assessment and on a full consultation with the young person.
- 2.11 The needs assessment for a young person aged 16 or over, who is in care of has left care, will be commissioned at a Statutory Review, and will be completed within three months of a young person becoming an eligible or relevant child, whether he or she does so on turning sixteen or later. The needs assessment will be led by the young persons social worker, and will be based on the Core Assessment Record in the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families, including the Assessment and Action Record. The young person, his family and carers, should normally be consulted along with all agencies involved in the young person's care. The outcome will be recorded in the summary record, and will be discussed at a Pathway Planning Meeting, where any dissenting views will be recorded.

- 2.12 Leaving Care Services in Suffolk will continue to be provided primarily by local projects managed by NCH and Shaftesbury Homes. Some young people may receive the primary input to their Pathway Plan either through the Connexions Service or from their social worker. Overall planning and review, and budgetary arrangements for care leavers will continue to be the responsibility of Social Care Services exercised through Care Management Teams in Children's Services.
- 2.13 Financial provision and support to care leavers will be provided in accordance with regulations, and will be based on principles of welfare rights, minimum standards of income maintenance, and accommodation costs, and incentives for those who take up training or non compulsory education places.
- 2.14 As they leave care young people should have a choice in the type and location of their accommodation, and an expectation that it will meet minimum standards. This will be achieved by developmental use of a countywide resource map, agreements with private landlords, and service level agreements with the major providers of young people's accommodation.
- 2.15 Pathway plans will meet the requirement to keep in touch with the young person through having a named person who will be responsible. Normally this will be the personal adviser, but in some cases it may be a former carer or another trusted adult. Plans should consider the quality of the contact, it is not enough for young people just to be seen. It is accepted that many care leavers, as they become settled and established in adult life, may find contact intrusive, and plans must therefore agree the method of keeping in touch. It is not acceptable to lose touch with those care leavers who may be hard to engage, as it is this group that is likely to be vulnerable and most in need of the protection afforded by the requirement to keep in touch.
- 2.16 Representations and complaints will be met in accordance with Regulations. These provide that where a young person makes a complaint, the complaint will be put in writing and submitted to the Complaints Manager, and there is then a fourteen day period for informal resolution, before moving into the full complaints system. All young people will have access to an advocate to help them formulate and present their complaint.

2.17 Good practice in working with care leavers will be based on established principles of the Children Act 1989, including sound assessment, robust planning and review mechanisms, listening to the views of young people, consulting young people, supporting families and working jointly across agency boundaries to provide a needs led service, with flexible provision by a trained workforce.

3 Statutory Responsibilities

3.1 For any young person who is, for the purposes of the Act, an eligible, relevant or former relevant child, and where the last authority to look after him or her is Suffolk, then Suffolk will continue to have responsibility for leaving care provision, regardless of where that young person moves to in England or Wales. In appropriate cases, and only by agreement, Suffolk may discharge this responsibility by providing funding to another local authority to act on our behalf.

3.2 For any child or young person who is looked after, it is the duty of the Council to advise, assist and befriend him with a view to promoting his welfare when the Council has ceased to look after him. This duty applies whether they are in care because of a care order or are accommodated by the council in the exercise of its social services functions, such as those under Section 20 of the Children Act. Suffolk, as the placing authority, will be responsible for the aftercare of looked after children placed out of County.

3.3 The Council has a duty to provide all eligible children (for definition see 4 below) with:-

3.3.1 an assessment of his/her needs while they are still looking after him/her, and after they cease to look after him/her

3.3.2 a Pathway Plan which is kept under regular review

3.3.3 a personal adviser

3.3.4 all the provisions of the looked after system.

3.4 The Council has a duty towards all relevant children (for definition see 4 below) to provide

- 3.4.1 a needs assessment
 - 3.4.2 a Pathway Plan, which is kept under regular review
 - 3.4.3 a personal adviser
 - 3.4.4 suitable accommodation and maintenance
 - 3.4.5 assistance to achieve the aims in the Pathway Plan, and to keep in touch
- 3.5 The Council has a duty towards all former relevant children (for definition see 4 below) to provide:-
- 3.5.1 a Pathway Plan which is kept under regular review (up to age 21)
 - 3.5.2 a personal adviser (up to age 21)
 - 3.5.3 assistance with education, training and employment (up to age 21, or until the young person has completed a programme of education or training agreed in the Pathway Plan, if later)
 - 3.5.4 vacation accommodation, or the funds to secure it, for higher education, or for residential further education, if needed (up to age 24)
 - 3.5.5 assistance in general, and to keep in touch (up to age 21), or longer if the young person is still being helped with education or training)
- 3.6 The Council has a duty to qualifying children (for definition see 4 below) to provide:-
- 3.6.1 advice and assistance, in cash or kind where the child was previously looked after by the Council or by a voluntary organisation. For other qualifying children this is a power, but not duty.
 - 3.6.2 Assistance with education and training (up to age 24).
 - 3.6.3 Vacation accommodation, or the funds to secure it, for higher education, or residential further education, if needed.

- 3.7 The Council is required by Regulations to prepare a written statement, which is available to the child and those with caring responsibilities, on how the needs of eligible and relevant children will be assessed. This statement is available at 2.11 above.
- 3.8 The Council has a duty to ensure this policy is easily comprehensible to young people, their parents and carers. An easy to read guide is to be provided, and in addition the policy and the guide are to be translated into relevant ethnic minority languages and is made available in versions accessible to young people with communication difficulties.
- 3.9 The Council is required by Regulations to prepare Pathway Plans, which address the following matters:-
- 3.9.1 the nature and level of personal support
 - 3.9.2 accommodation
 - 3.9.3 education and training
 - 3.9.4 employment, where relevant
 - 3.9.5 support to enable maintenance of appropriate family and social relationships
 - 3.9.6 meeting health and mental health needs
 - 3.9.7 contingency plans
- 3.10 The Council has a duty to arrange for eligible, and relevant children to have a Personal Adviser, and to continue the appointment for former relevant children. Personal Advisers will be provided through the Leaving Care Projects, they will be appropriately trained and qualified, and there will be contingency arrangements if the relationship breaks down. In appropriate cases the role of Personal Adviser may be taken on by the young person's social worker, their Connexions Young Persons Adviser, their foster carer or key worker.
- 3.11 The Council is required by Regulations to provide a Representations and Complaints System consistent with guidance from the Dept of Health.
- 3.12 In the cases of relevant and former relevant children who are the responsibility other local authorities and are now living in Suffolk, short term

assistance should be provided under Section 17 Children Act 1989, and arrangements made with the responsible authority to deliver the plan on their behalf.

- 3.13 Unaccompanied asylum seeking children who are looked after may reach their 18th birthday without having received a final decision on their asylum application. They will, therefore, be entitled to support both by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) and as either former relevant children or qualifying under Section 24. The Council is responsible to work with NASS to ensure that these young people's cases are managed sympathetically and their financial support managed appropriately, in accordance with Regulations.

4 Suffolk County Council's Eligibility Criteria

- 4.1 An "eligible child" is a young person who will go on to become a "care leaver" when they cease to be looked after. They will be aged 16 or 17 and currently looked after either under a Care Order or by agreement with those having parental responsibility. They will have been looked after for a period, or periods, totalling at least thirteen weeks since their 14th birthday, including one spell of four weeks or more. Children who are the subject of "respite" or "shared care" arrangements are not eligible. A sixteen or seventeen year old who is subject to a care order will remain eligible until their 18th birthday unless the order is discharged sooner.
- 4.2 A "relevant child" is a young person aged 16 or 17 who was previously an eligible child" and has now left care. They will cease to be a relevant child only if they successfully return for at least six months to the care of a parent, or a person who had parental responsibility or a residence order before they were looked after. Where a family placement breaks down before the child is 18 and the child ceases to live with the person concerned, the child is to be treated as a relevant child. Additional groups of relevant children are those who would have been relevant children but for the fact that on their sixteenth birthday were detained through the criminal justice system or in hospital.
- 4.3 A "former relevant child" is a young person aged 18-21, or up to 24 if in full time further or higher education, who has left care, having been on their eighteenth birthday either eligible or relevant.
- 4.4 Other young people qualifying for advice or assistance are those aged 16 to 21, or up to 24 if in full time further or higher education, who have been looked after over the age of 16 and are no longer

looked after. This includes those accommodated for a consecutive period of three months in any residential care home, mental nursing home, health service accommodation, and those who have been privately fostered. It also includes young people who were previously eligible or relevant but have now successfully returned home.

5 Responsibility Levels

- 5.1 The designated officer in the Social Care Services, responsible for ensuring that the Council fulfils its responsibilities under the Act, is the County Manager (Accommodation and Outreach) in Children's Services.
- 5.2 Leaving Care Services are provided through NCH and Shaftesbury Homes projects. Day to day running is the responsibility of the Project Managers, working under the supervision of the County Manager (Accommodation and Outreach) in Children's Services.
- 5.3 Services to children looked after are delivered by social workers based in specialist area teams, supervised by a Social Care Manager.
- 5.4 The decision to complete a needs assessment to inform pathway planning will be made at a Statutory Review, chaired by a Looked After Children Manager or another officer acting on their behalf.
- 5.5 The young person's allocated social worker is responsible for the completion of the needs assessment.
- 5.6 The Pathway Plan for eligible children will be agreed at a statutory review chaired by a Looked After Children Manager or another officer acting on their behalf. The Chair is responsible for ensuring that all agencies named in the Pathway Plan receive a copy of the whole Plan, or the relevant sections.
- 5.7 The delivery of the Pathway Plan to an eligible child is the responsibility of the allocated social worker, working in liaison with the Personal Adviser and the agencies named in the plan.
- 5.8 Reviews of the Pathway Plan of an eligible child are chaired by a Looked After Children Manager or another officer acting on their behalf. The chair is responsible for ensuring that all agencies named in the Pathway Plan receive a copy of the Review decisions.
- 5.9 The delivery of the Pathway Plan to a relevant child may be shared between the leaving care team, Connexions and Social Care Services. A Personal Adviser is responsible for day to day supervision and support. The social care manager is responsible for planning, review and budgetary management.
- 5.10 Reviews of the Pathway Plan to a relevant child are chaired by the social care manager. The chair is responsible for ensuring that all agencies named in the Pathway Plan receive a copy of the review decisions.
- 5.11 Delivery of services to a former relevant child may continue to be shared between the Leaving Care Team, Connexions and Social Care Services. However, Social Care Services will not be responsible for financial

maintenance, and Connexions will withdraw when the young person turns twenty, so it is expected that the primary agency will be the Leaving Care Team.

- 5.12 *Reviews* of the Pathway Plan to a former relevant child are chaired by the Social Care Manager. The chair is responsible for ensuring that all agencies named in the Pathway Plan receive a copy of the review decisions.
- 5.13 Where a representation or complaint has been received from the young person or their family, the Social Care Manager is responsible for putting the complaint in writing and for informal resolution and if this is unsuccessful the Complaints Manager is responsible to investigate. This responsibility applies in the case of eligible, relevant and former relevant children, and children qualifying for assistance.
- 5.14 There is no responsibility to provide young people qualifying for advice and assistance (for definition see 4.4 above) with a Pathway Plan or Personal Adviser. Such young people may be referred to Social Care Services, including self – referrals. Their needs are to be assessed by Customer First or Immediate Needs Team, and if appropriate, a referral made to the Leaving Care Team.

6 Financial Arrangements

- 6.1 The budget to support the implementation of the Act is a ring fenced sub programme of the Quality Protects Special Grant. It is made up of resources transferred from:-
- the benefit entitlement for relevant children, transferred from the Dept of Social Security
 - existing funds spent by Social Care Services on children coming under the ACT (SSA)
 - money from the Quality Protects Special Grant.
- 6.2 The budget will meet the cost of services to children both in care and leaving care, which are required by the Act, taking into account any exceptional benefit entitlement if the young person is a lone parent, sick or disabled. This will include :-
- accommodation and maintenance for eligible and relevant children
 - general assistance for relevant and former relevant children and children qualifying for assistance
 - help with employment up to age of 21
 - provision of personal advisers

- help with education and training until the completion of an agreed programme.

6.3 New services to meet the requirements of the Act include:-

- a dedicated finance clerk
- funding for three new support staff posts, one to be based in each Leaving Care Team
- training to enable unqualified staff, e.g. foster carers, child care practitioners, to take on the role of Personal Advisers.

6.4 In order to manage cost pressures the following strategies have been put in place:-

- clear methods of recording and tracking expenditure for audit purposes
- detailed procedural guidance regarding the new financial arrangements a Leaving Care Register

6.5 Costs that exceed the ring fenced budget will be met through base budget funding to ensure the Council meets its statutory obligations.

7 Information

7.1 The Act is based on the proposals in the consultation document "Me, Survive, Out There? - New Arrangements for Young People living in and Leaving Care" (July 1999. Social Exclusion Unit). It enacts commitment made within the White Paper "Modernising Social Services" (1998) and "The Governments Response to the Children's Safeguards Review" (1998)

7.2 Detailed provisions regarding the legislation are available in the Dept of Health "Regulations and Guidance" (2001). Circular LAC (2000) 22 gives details of the Children's Special Grant for 2001-4 including ring fenced budgets for the Act.

7.3 The Act is summarised and explained in the Local Government Association "Get In On The Act" (2001)

7.4 The Council's implementation plan, financial and H.R. strategy are outlined in a report to Caring and Protecting Theme Panel (2nd August 2001)

7.5 The Council's Training Strategy is based on material provided by First Key, that is to be cascaded to all agencies through Kerrison Conference and Training Centre. Personal advisers will have access to Connexions training.

- 7.6 The Council's inter agency strategy is led through Quality Projects 4 and 5 planning groups, and comprises an ongoing countywide implementation group, and an inter agency forum in each Leaving Care Team locality.
- 7.7 The following documents provide detailed procedural and good practice guidance for staff:-
- 7.7.1 Care Leavers – Needs Assessment (for young people aged 16 or over, who are in care or have left care.)
 - 7.7.2 Care Leavers – Pathway Plans.
 - 7.7.3 Care Leavers – Personal Advisers
 - 7.7.4 Financial Procedures
 - 7.7.5 Accommodation.
 - 7.7.6 Local Authority procedures for obtaining NI numbers for children in or leaving care.
 - 7.7.7 Plans for movement of care leavers outside local authority boundaries.
 - 7.7.8 Transition at 18 (for unaccompanied asylum seeking children.)
- 7.8 The following consultation documents will assist the assessment of needs and planning for care leavers:-
- 7.8.1 My skills
 - 7.8.2 Your Pathway Plan Review.
- 7.9 Pathway Plans are to be recorded using:-
- 7.9.1 Pathway Plan.
 - 7.9.2 Pathway Plan Review.

- 7.10 All eligible and relevant children will receive a copy of the Council's information booklet "Stepping Out." This provides an easy to read guide to the services and support that are provided under the Act. For young people whose preferred language is other than English, translation will be provided on request, and for young people with sensory disability the booklet will be provided in Braille, or on tape, or in large print version, on request.