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Dear Andrew,

Focused visit to City of London local authority children's services

This letter summarises the findings of a focused visit to City of London local authority children's services on 24 October 2018. The inspectors were Andy Whippey, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Kate Malleson, Her Majesty's Inspector.

Inspectors considered the local authority's arrangements for care leavers. They considered a range of evidence, including case discussions with care leavers, partner agencies, social workers and managers. They also considered the local authority performance management information, quality assurance information and young people's records.

Overview

Care leavers in the City of London benefit from a strong service that ensures that they are very well supported. They receive effective help which enables most to achieve good outcomes. There is a determined and appropriately ambitious political and corporate focus to sustain and improve outcomes for care leavers. The service knows itself well and is aware of the areas in which further improvement is required.

Skilled, determined social workers are persistent in engaging effectively with care leavers. All care leavers are in suitable safe accommodation and 'staying put' arrangements are actively promoted. There is a strong and consistent determination to ensure that care leavers access education, employment and training (EET), and care leavers receive effective help in developing the necessary skills to live

independently. Most of the care leavers in the City of London are unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. For these young people, there is proactive and sensitive consideration of their needs.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice

- Risk assessments to more clearly articulate measures to address and minimise risk.
- The more explicit and consistent demonstration of young people's involvement in preparing their pathway plans.
- The supervision of social workers to consistently demonstrate reflective, analytical supervision and clear management oversight.

Findings

- Individual risks to care leavers, including those at risk of going missing and sexual exploitation, are clearly understood, and the necessary support is provided to reduce risks. Risk assessments are routinely undertaken and add real value in terms of the understanding of any actual or potential risks to young people. They are consistently reviewed to consider any changes in young people's circumstances. Good support is offered when young people experience day-to-day difficulties. Focused work by social workers enables care leavers to make informed decisions and choices to keep them safe. While risks are well understood in a minority of risk assessments, there is insufficient clarity about the risk minimisation measures that are necessary to reduce risk.
- Social workers are consistently tenacious in their efforts to stay in touch with young people who leave care. The local authority has meaningful contact with all its care leavers. Social workers use a broad range of ways of staying in touch that are proportionate to the needs of each young person. Social workers work hard to build rapport, and several young people reported positively about the quality of support and advice offered to them. Young people were appreciative that social workers were strong advocates for them.
- Visits to young people are mostly well recorded, with their wishes and feelings clearly evident. A minority, however, would benefit from clarity relating to the outcome of the visit in terms of determining any future actions or changes in care planning. While work is being undertaken with young people to understand their histories and to ensure identity needs are met, this is not always well evidenced on case records.
- The accommodation needs of young people are being met effectively and all are in suitable accommodation. The different levels of support needed by young people are well understood, including the need for staying put arrangements where this is indicated by the level of need. Commissioning arrangements are effective in ensuring that there are appropriate accommodation options. For this

reason, care leavers live in accommodation where they feel supported and with a level of support consistent with their need. Young people spoken to by inspectors reported that they felt safe where they lived.

- Effective tenancy support enables young people to sustain their tenancies when they are ready to move into independent accommodation. There have been no tenancy breakdowns in the past year. Tenancy support has an appropriate focus on any emotional health support needs. Any risks which threaten the stability of care leavers' living arrangements are quickly identified and support is put in place. While there is clear consideration given to changes in the level of support to young people in supported accommodation, the rationale and decision-making for such change is not always clear on young people's records in order to evidence the rationale for such changes.
- Care leavers receive good support to help them build their skills to live independently. Effective support is provided by social workers, commissioning arrangements and tenancy support. This has a focus on developing the skills that care leavers need, such as learning to save money, budget and cook for themselves.
- Care leavers who are unaccompanied asylum seekers or refugees receive good support from their social workers, including help with understanding how to progress their application to stay in the United Kingdom. These young people are in suitable accommodation and are supported to access education. Sensitive consideration is given to their histories and they are supported to access help for their emotional and mental health needs.
- There is a clear, determined focus on ensuring that care leavers are engaged in EET activity. Inspectors found positive examples of sustained help that enabled young people to engage in college/education or work opportunities, including attending interviews and information sessions with them. Positive support is provided by the virtual school and social workers, and the information, advice guidance and resilience practitioner helps to sustain opportunities for care leavers.
- The emotional and physical health needs of care leavers are well considered and well met. Health assessments are conducted regularly and are of good quality. Care leavers consistently receive their health histories in a written form and meet with the designated nurse for children in care. This helps young people to understand their histories and enables them to make informed decisions about their future healthcare. The availability of the designated nurse for advice and consultation after they reach 18 years old enhances the health provision on offer.
- Pathway plans are mostly comprehensive with a clear focus on the needs of care leavers. However, the records indicate variability in young people's involvement in preparing them. In a minority of plans, the voice of the young person and their contribution to the plan is insufficiently clear. Pathway plans are not always being consistently reviewed when young people's circumstances change, for example a

change in their living arrangements. It is not always clear from records if young people have had an opportunity to contribute or comment on them or suggest any alterations or amendments.

- The independent reviewing officer (IRO) is effective in improving planning for young people between 16 and 17 years. Effective midpoint reviews and consistent communication with young people ensure that care planning is focused on improving outcomes. Reviews of plans undertaken by the IRO are written to the young person and are of good quality.
- Senior leaders and managers are making efforts to ensure that care leavers' views and experiences are being used to help to inform service improvements. Care leavers are involved in determining the local offer required by recent legislation. The local authority is aware of the need to strengthen the voice of care leavers on the local authority's safeguarding subcommittee, which fulfils the role of the corporate parenting board.
- Care leavers highly value the opportunities to meet each other, and the professionals who help them, at regular children in care council meetings. Care leavers benefit from discussing relevant and important topics in these meetings, such as the issue of consent in relationships. The celebration of achievements, participation in a range of activities, visits and holidays are enjoyed by young people.
- Social workers reported that they enjoy working for the local authority and find their managers to be visible and supportive. Caseloads are manageable, and this enables direct work to take place with young people. Social workers benefit from access to a wide range of training opportunities applicable to the needs of care leavers.
- There is some variability in the quality of management oversight and supervision. Inspectors did not always see consistent examples of good quality, reflective, analytical supervision and management oversight. Some supervision records do not provide sufficient clarity as to the specific actions they need to complete and by when in order to improve outcomes for young people.
- Audit arrangements for the provision of services to care leavers are good. Audits are effective tools in identifying the difference that practice has made to improve outcomes for young people. They are qualitatively focused as well as compliance focused, and the outcomes of audits are evident in the local authority's self-improvement plan.

Yours sincerely

Andy Whippey
Her Majesty's Inspector