

Next Step Service

Protocols

April 2020

Function

Next Step is the Salford leaving Care Service.

Next Step work with looked after young people and care leavers from 16-25 years.

The team currently works with approximately 350 young people and the workforce is made up of qualified social workers (known as Pathway Advisers) and unqualified workers (known as Aftercare Workers), a Substance Misuse Worker (Recovery Coach), a Relevant and Former Relevant Review Officer, Supported Lodgings Worker and Corporate Parent Officer.

Processes

Looked after young people who meet the eligibility criteria, transfer across to Next Step around the age of 16 as detailed within the transfer protocol.

Young people subject of a Care Order remain a looked after child until the order expires on their 18th birthday. Next Step and Salford Children's Services have worked over the years to ensure that where possible young people only leave care when they are ready and prepared.

The Children's Leaving Care Act 2000 was introduced in response to the poor outcomes achieved in key areas by care leavers across the country. The Act places statutory duties on Local Authorities; where previously many duties were purely discretionary.

The Act states that all young people must have an allocated personal adviser (Pathway Adviser) and pathway plan. The Act places duties on the local authority and other key partners to work together to produce better joined up planning and to improve the outcomes for care leavers.

Each young person is allocated a worker who will help in the preparation for moving on from care and support that person in accessing education and employment. Each young person is involved in preparing their own pathway plan, which concentrates on life skills development and looks to enable young people to become independent. The plan must include budgeting, housing, health, education and leisure. It also looks at where the young person wants to be in five years and plans the route to achieving that aspiration.

Corporate Parenting

Corporate Parenting is the term used to describe the responsibility of the local authority towards looked after children and care leavers.

Salford City Council is the Corporate Parent of all Salford looked after children and care leavers.

Corporate Parenting places collective responsibility on local authorities to achieve good parenting for all looked after children and care leavers. It requires ownership and leadership at a senior level and includes all elected members.

This means recognising our responsibility for Salford's looked after children and care leavers and make their needs a priority as we would want to seek the same outcomes for them as any good parent would want for their own children.

To assist in this process Salford created a specialist Corporate Parenting Officer post in 2009. The main responsibilities laid down in the post are to advance the corporate parenting agenda across the council and its key partners as well as making a real difference for looked after children and care leavers in areas of inequality, notably unemployment, homelessness and health.

The post holder reports back to the Corporate Parenting Panel made up of elected members and children's services officials.

Working alongside a designated human resources officer, Connexions service and GMYN (Greater Manchester Youth Network), The Corporate Parenting Officer has already made a significant impact on education, employment and training opportunities (including Apprenticeships) available to care leavers.

Corporate parenting is the responsibility of every council officer and every elected member. This responsibility is passed on to partner organisations through our own ethics and beliefs. We want the very best for "our children and young people" and so for those partners who choose to work closely alongside the Council, we would like them to "sign up" to help improve the outcomes of our Looked after Children and care leavers.

In 2012 and 2015 the council was awarded the 'From Care2work Quality Mark' in recognition of the work achieved in reducing the number of NEET (not in education, employment or training) care leavers in Salford. This work has continued through developing the 'Salford Offer' alongside our Care Leaver Strategy and Corporate Parenting Strategy.

It is important to achieve more sustainable opportunities for looked after children and care leavers in Salford. This includes ensuring fair access to mainstream provision as well as creating bespoke programmes to help them to prepare for the world of work.

Recognising some of our local partner organisations are large employers, we might expect them to contribute towards achieving positive outcomes for "our children". This should particularly be case for companies benefitting from Council contracts. Ideally would want these companies to consider ring fencing Apprenticeships and other work-related opportunities, as well as signing up to the Care Leaver Covenant.

Unaccompanied Asylum seeking Young People

Salford Children's Services has seen a number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, (UASC) presenting themselves in Salford in recent years. This reflects a wider national trend, where significant numbers have entered the United Kingdom having fled war zones and persecution in their countries of origin.

The duty and investigation team (DAT) undertake an initial referral when a young person presents at a Salford Police station claiming to be an UASC. The young person would then be placed in accommodation through an accommodation provider, whilst the age assessment (If appropriate) is undertaken. A representative from the DAT and Next Step team should undertake a Merton compliant age assessment. Once agreed the young person would be transferred over to Next Step if they were judged to be aged 16 or 17, or in the case of an under 16 they would be transferred to a residential children's home or foster placement and the case transferred over to the LAC Social Work team.

If deemed to be aged below 18 years, the UASC are accommodated under section 20.

Next Step has adopted the triple planning principle in relation to working from the outset with UASC and also with the former UASC, particularly where their Home Office status has yet to be finally determined.

Next Step staff undertook a one day training course, run by Save the Children, focusing on triple planning and updating their awareness of home office and UK Border Agency advice in relation to this vulnerable group of young people.

Next Step staff have formed strong working relationships both on an individual and group basis.

Senior Practitioner Responsibilities

The duty senior practitioner will assist the Next Step manager

The senior practitioner will be available for consultation with all social workers and unqualified staff.

The senior practitioner will accompany less experienced workers to court, child protection conferences, core group meetings, unaccompanied young person interviews with the Home Office etc where this is deemed to be appropriate.

The senior practitioners will also provide reflective group supervision to Next Step staff on a quarterly basis. Current feedback has been positive and the agenda warmly received by the staff team.

Duty Worker Responsibilities

Duty workers are expected to be available for their allocated duty day. Where possible other appointments should not be arranged for duty days. If for any reason the member of staff cannot cover duty then they are expected to make arrangements with a colleague.

The duty worker will provide a service in respect of all cases where the allocated worker is unavailable for the day. They will respond to calls and will undertake visits where necessary.

The duty worker will ensure that any contact they have undertaken on a case is recorded within carefirst in a timely manner and that the allocated worker is alerted to this.

Duty workers must ring the 'on call' Next Step manager following a late visit where they are not expected to return to the office. This is to confirm the visit has been completed safely and to update the duty manager on the case.

Staying Put

Salford Children's Services introduced the Continuing Care Allowance in 2003. The allowance is paid to foster carers to enable young people placed in foster care to remain living in their foster home post 18, in line with their individual needs and their education, training and work programme.

In 2014 the 'Staying Put' procedures were embedded in Salford and any young person (regardless of their activity) is able to be supported within their foster care home post-18 with agreement.

Finance

All young person leaving the care system before 18, are unable to claim state benefits. Next Step has a financial policy (updated April 2020) which ensures that these young people receive a weekly allowance from Next Step and all their accommodation costs are paid for in full.

Leisure

All Next Step young people have free access to Salford City Leisure Fit City Centres.

Next Step has arranged a number of sports activities for its young people, including football, running, cycling and boxing. Besides the obvious health benefits, these also promote social engagement and the development of teamworking and confidence-building.

Next Step has also created strong community links with DOE (Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme), RHS (Royal Horticultural Society), Army benevolent Fund (ABF) and the Veteran's Garage Project.

Administrator Duties

The administration team provide a customer care service answering calls and greeting callers to the office. They will gate keep non-relevant calls and will signpost callers to other services.

The administration team provide support for Next Step staff. They undertake all administrative tasks associated with looked after children and care leavers. Looked after medicals and personal educational plans are arranged by an administration worker in liaison with the young person's social worker.

All letters, reports and pathway plans are typed and electronically stored by the administration team.

All post coming into the building is scanned by the administration team before being passed to the recipient

Staff Movements

Staff availability and movements will be monitored via the signing in and out board; the health and safety file and leave, TOIL and working at home diary.

TOIL, leave and working at home requests must be approved, entered within the leave, TOIL and working at home diary and agreed by the Service Manager or Practice Managers within the Next Step service.

Reporting Absences

All staff will ensure they contact and speak directly to their line manager in line with procedures.

If their line manager is absent or on leave then they will speak to another manager of the same standing or above within the service. It is not acceptable to speak to administration staff or leave messages on answering services.

All sickness will be monitored by the manager with the support of the administration team.

The attendance management policy will be used to manage sickness issues.

Carers Leave

In emergency situations carers leave of up to 5 days per annum is available. However this is intended for situations defined in the policy and alternative care arrangements need to be made as soon as possible.