**Starting to prepare for independence**

***Introducing looked after children aged 17 to their Personal Advisor in the leaving care service.***

Date of publication: 11th November 2020

Date of review: 30th November 2021

**Introduction**

This guidance sets out the arrangements for all young people whose support is transferring between allocated practitioners in the following teams within Newham Children’s Services, so that work is Purposeful, Planned, & Focused:

• Children in Care Service

• Children with Disabilities Service

• Safeguarding & Intervention Service

• Care Leavers Service

1. **Principles underpinning the introduction of Looked after Children to the Leaving Care service.**
2. These procedures set out ‘best practice’ principles and processes regarding new relationships for young people with new adults; sometimes called ‘transfer.’ In order for the process to work as effectively as possible a significant amount of care and thought is needed from the professionals working with the young person who is preparing for independence at 17 years and leaving the Council’s care at 18 years. This is a significant moment in a young adult’s life and it is important that this be given the respect and care needed to ensure that they feel supported during this time. The process should be smooth and meaningful, keeping the young adult informed at all times and making sure they are an active participant in any and all decisions made and plans that relate to them. The needs of the young adult are paramount at all times when considering a change of worker and team or an introduction to new workers. A change of, or new, practitioner is a significant event for a young adult, therefore it needs to be reflected in sensitive and careful handling by managers and practitioners. The bottom line is it needs rigorous planning, communication and preparation by all involved adults. It is vital that this work is Purposeful, Planned, & Focused in order to keep our young people at the centre of this process.
3. We expect all staff, practitioners and managers to work together to share information respectfully and early and in a way that enriches a young person’s care experience.
4. **Introducing a Personal Advisor from the Leaving Care service at 17 (including young people supported in the Disabled Children Service)**
5. Business support will maintain a list of every looked after young person becoming 17 each month. They will send an alert 10 working days before the beginning of the month to Managers within the Looked After Service or the Disabled Children Service, as well as the Leaving Care Service. This will alert everyone that a young person will be becoming 17 years old in the coming month. This will include the Managers within the Disabled Children Service.
6. The Leaving Care Managers will then review and co-allocate the young person within their service with the aim of positively matching a Personal Advisor(PA) and young person as far as possible. They will then co-allocate the Personal Advisor (PA) on Azeus and send an email notification to the relevant looked after Manager, Social Workers, Independent Reviewing Officers, advisory teacher or EET worker and business support confirming the allocation of the Personal Advisor in order for the tracker to be updated.
7. Once the list has been updated by business support this will be provided to the Service Managers for Looked After Children and Leaving Care in order to have ownership and oversight of this process and to ensure that co-allocation of young people takes place smoothly and in a timely manner. The list will also be sent to the Head of Virtual School and the Service Manager for the Independent Reviewing Officers.
8. Once a Personal Advisor (PA) has been allocated, he or she will have 7 working days to send a letter to the young person introducing themselves and outlining what their role will be whilst the young person begins to prepare for independence. This letter should positively convey the enthusiasm the Personal Advisor has in supporting the young person in this time of transition and a date should be made with the allocated Social Worker, IRO, carer and young person for an introduction. **NB: - Anyone reading this guidance should note that responsibility for the looked after child aged 17 years, remains with the allocated social worker up until the child’s 18th birthday. The purpose of co-allocation is to commence the building of a new network around a young person preparing to leave our care.**
9. Once allocated the Personal Advisor will offer guidance, scrutiny, and advice in respect of the young person’s pathway plan. It is an expectation that the Social Worker will send a copy of the Pathway Plan to the Personal Advisor prior to every statutory review for feedback, advice, and scrutiny as their role involves making sure that the plan for the young person focuses on what the young person needs in order to become a successful young adult.
10. Although the Personal Advisor does not hold any case responsibility, this time should be used to begin to form a relationship with the young person so that their transition is as smooth as possible. Below are list of meetings that a Personal Advisor is required to attend in order to ensure they have a good understanding of the young person and what their needs are as they are preparing to leave our care.
11. Personal Advisors will be expected to attend the last Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings before the young person becomes 18 years.
12. They should also attend all Looked After Children Reviews.
13. They should also attend any Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) annual review meetings from 17 years.

Key areas the advisor must focus on both with the social worker directly and when helping to develop the pathway plan are: -

* The preparation for independence that has taken place, including housing plans, education and employment, emotional wellbeing and financial plans, savings, and budgeting.
* Where the young person will live and what support they will need to live independently.
* Any unresolved immigration status issues
* Any family finding/network building activity that needs to happen to support the young person into young adulthood and beyond, including returning home if this is the plan and is in their best interests.

1. **Transfer from the Looked After Children team to the Leaving Care service at 18 (including young people supported in the Disabled Children Service)**
2. Transfers between practitioners and services will be made in good time ensuring as much continuity as possible for young adults. All transfers between the Looked After Children Service and the Leaving Care Service will take place on the young adults 18th birthday. The outgoing Social Worker and Manager will have a maximum of 5 working days to complete the formal transfer on the system once the young person becomes 18. **It is expected that all of the introductions and handovers are completed at least one month prior to the young person becoming 18.**
3. A handover meeting must take place a **minimum of one month prior to the young person becoming 18 years old.** This should be a celebration of their achievements and also a moment that signifies the end of their journey being a Looked after Child and the start of independence as an adult.
4. This gathering should include the young person and the important professional and family networks that have been supporting them whilst they have been looked after, for example their IRO, advisory teacher or EET worker, Social Worker, friends and family. It should also include any new people who will be in the support network for the young person as an adult. The meeting must include the personal advisor (PA), manager from Leaving Care, and for any young people transferring to adult social care, it must include the adult care social worker. A small budget of £30 is available for celebration food for the ‘moving to independence’ meeting.
5. The purpose of noticing this important moment, is so that the new individuals supporting the young adult are all clear about their roles and so the young person is aware who will be supporting them and what the next steps are to plan for their future as an adult. This meeting can also be an opportunity to ensure that any outstanding work is completed and a clear timeline is agreed, so the young person is clear and this in turn reduces any anxiety they may have. It will also send a clear and positive message to the young person about how we value and care about them and about our ambition for them as adults who we will support until they are aged 25.
6. The outgoing practitioner initiates the transfer process on Azeus no later than two weeks prior to the young person turning 18. This will enable the file to be fully audited by the outgoing Manager and also the receiving Manager in Leaving Care. The file will be audited to ensure that everything is fully up to date at this point.
7. If any outstanding work is found then it must be completed within the two week window prior to the young person becoming 18. It is also important to be sensitive to the needs of the young person and keep that central to any handover. This is particularly needed with any young people who will be transferring to adult social care and those who are currently supported within the Disabled Children’s Service. Their families must be fully involved providing the young adult is in agreement.
8. Below is a list of “Bottom Lines” that must be completed and evidenced before a young person transfers to the Leaving Care Service. The work completed below is the responsibility of the Looked After Social Worker with oversight from the Manager. As above it is important to be mindful of any additional needs of the young person and that some of the work below may look very different for a disabled young person and therefore the network and teams must be sensitive to those needs.
9. Updated Pathway Plan setting out clear future goals that the young person has seen and agreed. This will include their EET aspirations and plan to move towards these. It will also have some input from the Virtual School as appropriate.
10. Health Passport completed and signed at their final review
11. Completed Universal Credit Application (where necessary)
12. Update on Immigration status, copy of Statement of Evidence Form (SEF) for asylum applications and Triple Pathway Planning evidenced.
13. Personalized goodbye letter from Social Worker with information about their work together
14. Completed Life-story Work
15. Family finding/network building activity (as needed and appropriate)
16. Housing plan
17. Completed budget and financial planning module certificate
18. Risk assessments where there are concerns of contextual harm, ensuring that there are transitional safeguarding plans in place
19. Chronology
20. Genogram
21. Role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) – As part of the transition process it will be essential for the young person to have had their final review in advance of their 18th birthday to ensure that all preparations are in place for them so that they can make the transition into leaving care services properly. It is therefore essential that the final Looked After Children Review take place no later than 8 weeks before the young person turns 18 years old. This will ensure that all relevant plans are updated by the young person, their Personal Advisor (PA), Social Worker and IRO prior to becoming 18. It will avoid any delay which is vital at this important time.
22. **Any delays must be immediately escalated to the Service Manager for Children in Care and / or the Service Manager for Care Leavers who will act to ensure the work is prioritised.**

**Dispute Resolution:**

It is important to note that the young person’s primary relationship will move to Leaving Care when they turn 18 years old and are eligible for a service. Any outstanding work will not delay this from happening, however Managers will agree a deadline of when work will be completed and by whom. Managers will work co-operatively to ensure young people move between teams safely and respectfully. Resolution should in all cases be achieved within 1 working day if there are difficulties that arise. The key aim is to ensure that the needs of our young people are kept front and centre by managers working together. Should any disputes not be resolved between managers then the first point of escalation would be the Service Manager for Looked After Children. If the matter is still unable to be resolved, then the matter can further escalate to the Head of Service for Children in Care and Care Leavers. In rare and exceptional cases, it may be necessary to refer the matter to the Director of Operations whose decision will be binding.