

Extract from the Internal Audit Activity Progress Report 2018/19

Completed Internal Audit Activity during the period January to March 2019

Summary of Limited Assurance Opinions on Control

Service Area: Children and Families

Audit Activity: Youth Service - Care Leaving Service

Background

A care leaver is defined as a person aged between 16 and 25, who has been looked after by a local authority for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who was looked after by the local authority at school-leaving age or after that date. Such care could be in foster care, residential care (mainly children's homes), or other arrangements outside the immediate or extended family.

The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 specify that a Pathway Plan must be prepared as soon as possible after the assessment of needs and must be recorded in writing. The local authority must review the Pathway Plan at least every six months and any changes must be recorded in writing.

Scope

This audit reviewed a sample of care leavers to ensure that plans are in place, that they have a clear pathway mapped out and that the plans are being reviewed and amended as necessary.

Risk Assurance – Satisfactory

Control Assurance – Limited

Key Findings

A sample of 24 care leavers (7% of the population as at 25/09/2018) was randomly selected for testing and the records for each were reviewed in LiquidLogic (Children's Case Management System). The results were varied and contained the following anomalies:

- The care leaver was over 25 and their case should have been closed: 1
- Pathway Plans overdue: 2
- Pathway Plan sign-off dated as prior years: 3
- Review Involvement Forms incomplete: 2
- Summary page on LiquidLogic not updated: 13

As part of the audit scope, the auditor conducted 1:1 meetings with two care leavers who are employed by the council as ambassadors on zero hours contracts. General feedback from those meetings was included in the audit report and the specific issues have been reported separately to the Director of Children's Services for appropriate action to be taken.

The service has taken part in and utilised the outputs from a survey of care leavers across the South West, entitled 'Bright Spots', which was undertaken by the Coram Voice charity and Bristol University in March 2018. Further surveys are to be conducted annually in order to compile benchmarking data and trend analysis. The survey was confidential, meaning the leaving care service received a summary of generalised comments from care leavers in Gloucestershire on topics, rather

Extract from the Internal Audit Activity Progress Report 2018/19

than from individual care leavers. Despite this, the service has nevertheless been able to utilise the outcomes of the survey as part of Pathway Planning with care leavers and produce a programme of actions and commitments for improving the service they provide for care leavers, children and young people.

Conclusion

The service is endeavouring to provide as much support to care leavers as possible by producing Pathway Plans that are relevant and tailored to care leaver needs. However, the testing of a random sample of care leavers found that, in some cases, the record-keeping in LiquidLogic has not been robust. Whilst that is partly due to the logistics and levels of training to fully utilise the benefits of such a system, there were also clear oversights and delays in Pathway Planning. These gaps were corrected after being identified as part of the audit.

The 2018 Bright Spots survey provided feedback from care leavers and this identified that there were some topic areas where the care leavers are not receiving the help they need. An action plan has been created to ensure that as many of the issues raised are alleviated as soon as possible.

A positive development is that all leaving care workers now have smart phones and laptops that, amongst other things, will make it easier for them to update LiquidLogic following meetings with, or information received from, the care leavers.

Management Actions

Three high priority recommendations were raised within the report – focusing on staff training, regular monitoring by management (including consideration of business continuity arrangements for staff turnover) and appropriate management, monitoring and report to senior management of the Bright Spots commitments to ensure action progression. Management have responded positively to the recommendations made within the report.