

Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

18 June 2024

Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic

Addendum Report

Report from: Dr Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive

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Summary

This report was considered by the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12 June 2024 and its draft comments are set out below.

1. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee
 - 1.1. The Head of Corporate Parenting and the Service Manager, Leaving Care introduced the report and gave a presentation which gave some background and context as to the reasoning behind the proposals for Medway to join the over 90 Locals Authorities that had agreed to add care experience as a protected characteristic.
 - 1.2. A consultation has taken place with Medway's Care Experienced Young People to capture their voice on this matter and an overwhelming proportion agreed with the recommendation for care experience to be protected in local policies for Medway.
 - 1.3. As a result, recommendations for change were made and would be presented to the Council meeting of 18 July 2024 to join the National campaign with other Local Authorities (LA) to agree to make being care experience a protected characteristic in policy.
 - 1.4. Members raised several comments and questions which included:
 - The proposals were welcomed and highlighted the collective and high aspirations for Children In Care (CIC). The continuous work to improve life chances for the young people of Medway was commended as well as the current good practice of the Leaving Care Team.

- It was appreciated that councils may not necessarily know what this would look like long term but all councils that had come together to have care experience as a protected characteristic were commended.
 - it was important that this be used as a tool for young people to direct what they want and for additional or further stigma not to arise as a result of this. It was encouraging that Medway officers as well as other LAs were mindful of any unintended consequences.
- 1.5. **Practicality of Care Experience**- in response to a question on what care experience as a protected characteristic meant practically for young people, officers said that outside on the national collective campaign on this matter, and locally, for Medway having being asked by CIC what it would mean for them, it was about recognition, listening to young people and working to eradicate stigma and discrimination of being care experienced. Initially it would mean Medway reviewing its Council policies and for care experience to be recognised as equally as other factors such as age, gender or race. Having care experience as a protected characteristic would be used as a tool to enable conversations to take place and raise awareness which would result in reduction of stigma with the longer-term aim of it being normalised.
 - 1.6. **Budget implications** – it was asked what budget implication would be associated with changes to Medway’s policies on this matter, officers said that they may be minimal and would be different for every department. At this stage if Medway decided to agree the recommendations the only impact envisaged would be in updating of policies as at this stage there would be very minimal financial implications.
 - 1.7. **Medway CIC in other Local Authorities** – it was asked what this would mean for Medway children placed outside of Medway, officers said that each LA has priorities and financial pressures. Medway service provision would be for Medway young people and leaving care duties would not change, but the goal was for care experience to be recognised in equality law and that if it were protected nationally, all needs would be applied to legislation regardless of where the child or young person resides.
 - 1.8. **Schools** – it was asked what work was being done by schools’ in understanding the impact of stigma for CIC and what support was being offered to tackle issues. It was vital for virtual schools to emphasise the importance of supporting CIC in addressing the stigma faced in schools. Officers said that Virtual Schools undertake training as part of the statutory support provided to schools. Schools work on trauma informed approach but there was more that could be done. Medway schools were committed to being trauma informed and a high proportion of schools had completed the training programme.
 - 1.9. **Meetings in schools** – it was asked what was being done to address the concerns raised by children about professional meetings taking place in schools. Officers said that this information was gathered from older cohort, and they were actively listening to children that did not want meetings to take place during school time. They were in the process of introducing an electric PEP which would enable children to complete their sections after school.

- 1.10. **Supporting aspirations** – it was asked what was being done regarding the 18 plus pathways for young people in care and if there was a work experience pathway within the Council for young people. Officers said that as corporate parents, the Council was invested in supporting aspirations of its CIC/Care Leavers. Post 16 and 18 conversations commenced as soon as a young person became a CIC (age appropriate). An aspiration officer would monitor and track outcomes and work closely with colleges regarding their retention rates of pupils. Care Leavers were automatically shortlisted for interview for any jobs applied for at the Council.
- 1.11. It was added that the Council had recently been successful in their bid for funding from Department for Education for a residential apprenticeship programme to train up to 12 care experienced people. Many young people were keen to give back and there was now a work based route for them to receive practical training at places such as Eden house and Parklands, and gain qualifications in residential work.
- 1.12. The aspirations for CIC/Care Leavers were embedded into the work of the Council and young people who were care experienced were actively encouraged to come and work on teams and projects for young people. Young people were encouraged to become ambassadors with the possibility of future job opportunities with the aspiration for more young people.
- 1.13. Officers were asked to share details of how many young care experienced young people had received work and training opportunities from the Council.
- 1.14. **Decision:**
1. The Committee noted the report.
 2. The Committee agreed that an updated report once recommendations were agreed by Council, be presented to a future meeting.
 3. The Committee recommended that officers work with schools on what further support could be put in place to address issues experienced by children in care.

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Appendices

None

Background papers

None