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Heather Sandy
Executive Director of Children's Services
County Offices
Newland
Lincoln
LN1 1YQ

Dear Ms Sandy

Focused visit to Lincolnshire children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the focused visit to Lincolnshire children's services on 1 and 2 July 2025. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Rachel Griffiths, Sophie Wales and Michael Taylor.

Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for care leavers, which included a specific focus on:

- The quality and consistency of pathway planning and case recording.
- The care leaver offer, including for those aged over 21.
- Responses to care leavers in custody.
- The physical, emotional and mental health support that care leavers receive.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. Inspectors looked at a range of evidence, including discussions with leaving care workers, managers and care leavers themselves. They also looked at local authority performance management and quality assurance information and children's case records.

Headline findings

Since the previous full inspection in April 2023, when children's services were judged to be outstanding overall but good for the experiences of care leavers, leaders have been resolute in their quest to improve services for care leavers. As a result of this relentless determination and an effective transformation programme, which has resulted in the care leavers' service being insourced, tangible progress has been made. This was evident from what young people said during the visit about their experiences. Leaders have an excellent understanding of service strengths and successes but also know what they need to do to meet their high aspirations to ensure that every care leaver in Lincolnshire has excellent experiences.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice?

- Pathway plans, which include clear, time-bound actions to promote young people's welfare, progress and safety, and are consistently up to date.
- Case recording, to capture significant events, to help workers and young people understand post-care journeys and use this to inform planning.

Main findings

Leaders have strengthened the approach to planning for transition into the care leaver service since the previous inspection. As a result of children having time to build positive relationships with a leaving care worker well before they move into the leaving care service, children have a smooth transition from their social worker to their leaving care worker.

Leaving care workers are kind, caring and respectful towards the young people that they support. One worker's comment exemplifies this. They said, 'I cannot put into words how much joy this job brings me. It is a privilege to work with my young people. It is great to be part of their next steps.'

Leaving care workers know their young people well and have consistent and enduring relationships with them. Young people know that they have someone they can turn to, to share their aspirations and worries. Young people who inspectors spoke to were unanimously positive about the help and support they receive from their leaving care workers. Young people's comments about their workers included 'they are amazing,' and 'they helped to transform my life'.

Leaving care workers visit young people in line with their needs and keep in touch with them in between visits via texts, calls and emails. Workers persist when young people have not responded to them to ensure that they are safe and well.

The quality of pathway planning has improved since the previous inspection. Leaving care workers write plans respectfully and sensitively in consultation with, and to, young people. The plans provide clarity about young people's views and aspirations. Leaders are aware, though, that there remains more to do so that these written plans provide more clarity about who specifically will be doing what, and by when, to help young people achieve their goals. While leaving care workers usually keep pathway plans up to date, for a small number of young people, there is a delay in updates when their circumstances change. This makes it more difficult to understand how the relevant professionals around the young person are helping and supporting them.

A strengthened, comprehensive and equitable local offer means that care leavers in Lincolnshire receive the same help and support regardless of which Lincolnshire borough they live in, and regardless of whether they live in or outside of the county. With the offer embedded into pathway plans, alongside reinforcement from their leaving care workers, young people are helped to understand their rights and

entitlements. During the visit, young people confirmed that they fully understand and receive what they are entitled to.

Leaders have considerably strengthened the offer to care leavers over the age of 21. For those young people who need it, they now continue to receive help and support from their allocated leaving care worker for as long as they need it. For those who no longer need such intensive support, they move to the recently developed 'step forward' service, where they receive information, advice and guidance as and when they need it. Quarterly newsletters and regular calls to these young people mean that those aged over 21 have regular reminders about what is on offer and that the service will always be there for them if, and when, they need it.

Care leavers in custody receive a consistently responsive service. They receive regular visits by their leaving care workers, who have consistent and positive relationships with them. Workers advocate strongly on behalf of young people to help ensure that when they transition between prisons or back into the community, they are supported to succeed moving forward. This is an improvement since the previous inspection.

Care leavers who are pregnant or young parents receive effective help and support. Multi-agency packages of support are helping these young people to develop the skills and confidence to succeed as parents.

The positive relationships young people have with their leaving care worker add a layer of protection for those young people who are vulnerable and at risk of exploitation. Workers identify risk, provide practical support and have a focus on young people's safety. Although safety planning occurs, and management oversight of this is reflective, some written safety plans lack clarity and timescales. Likewise, when there is a delay in updating safety aspects of the pathway plan, it is difficult to see how risk should be managed to help ensure young people's safety in the interim.

Leaving care workers support unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people well. A specialist worker brings strength and insight into leaving care workers' overall understanding of the needs of this large cohort of care leavers.

Through improved help and support, including an extended virtual school offer, and support from dedicated education, employment and training officers, increasing numbers of young people are accessing and succeeding in education, employment, training and apprenticeships. Leaders rightly aspire to build further on this progress so that even more young people can develop and reach their full potential.

Leaving care workers and skilled emotional well-being practitioners support young people's physical and emotional health extremely well. Some young people told inspectors about the positive difference the support has made to their lives. Because of this, they said they became equipped to engage in meaningful therapy and make and sustain positive changes emotionally and in many other aspects of their lives.

Leaving care workers write their case records sensitively to young people. However, a lack of case summaries and chronologies in case records makes it more difficult to understand young people's journey beyond care. Consequently, it is harder for new workers, and young people themselves, to fully understand their post-care histories and significant events that have occurred and shaped their lives.

The stable senior leadership team has a solid understanding of the quality of practice and impact of it in the care leavers' service. This is evidenced through a self-evaluation that reflected what inspectors saw during the visit. Robust quality assurance and audit systems contribute to leaders' highly effective line of sight of practice.

The care leaver transformation programme, which has seen the recent insourcing of the service, has progressed at the right pace. The programme has been informed by young people and staff, and because of incremental changes, the transformation has gone smoothly, without any negative impact on young people.

The care leaver workforce in Lincolnshire has remained stable, and frontline worker and management capacity has increased in recognition of the increasing numbers of care leavers in Lincolnshire. Overall, workers have been very positive about the changes made as a result of the service being insourced, with the greatest benefit sited as the co-location of the care leaver service with other children's services and early help teams.

The workers in the care leaver service are very positive about working in Lincolnshire. Despite busy caseloads, they feel very well supported by managers at every level. Staff shared during the visit that they love working with young people that they know well and care about.

Senior, political and corporate leaders are ambitious corporate parents. This is demonstrated by the improvements made to the local offer in consultation with young people. A recent restructure to the corporate parenting panel means that it is more focused on children and young people's experiences of being parented and supported. This continues to contribute to service development.

Leaving care workers support young people to participate in a wealth of events and participation activities. This ensures that young people's voices are heard, as well as enabling them to have fun, make new friends and have new experiences. This supports them to develop socially and emotionally and grow in self-confidence.

Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account when planning the next inspection or visit.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Griffiths
His Majesty's Inspector