

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
Textphone 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/ofsted



Martin Purbrick
Executive Director for Children, Education and Families
Cambridgeshire County Council
New Shire Hall
Emery Crescent
Enterprise Campus
Alconbury Weald
Huntingdon
PE28 4YE

Dear Mr Purbrick

Focused visit to Cambridgeshire children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the focused visit to Cambridgeshire children's services on 29 and 30 July 2025. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Sophie Wales and Margaret Burke.

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

- The quality and suitability of accommodation.
- Staying close and in touch.
- Employment, education and training.
- The impact of leaders on practice with care leavers.

The 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 personal advisors, 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 last inspection in 2024, when the experiences and progress of care leavers were judged to require improvement to be good, arrangements for care leavers in Cambridgeshire have strengthened. While still early days, the impact of this determined work is evident, though leaders know they have more to do to ensure consistently effective practice in the care leavers' service. Leaders have taken important steps to create the conditions for success, which are now starting to gain

momentum. Important gains have been achieved by stabilising the senior leadership team, reducing the reliance on agency workers, investing in additional personal advisor capacity and reducing caseload pressures for personal advisors. This is leading to longer-lasting relationships and creating greater stability for care leavers. Leaders have an accurate self-assessment, which means they are correctly cited on areas for progress.

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

- The quality and impact of frontline managers' supervision to promote and provide reflective practice for personal advisors.
- The quality and impact of frontline managers' oversight to ensure purposeful and considered case direction.
- The quality and consistency of pathway planning.
- The range and accessibility of suitable accommodation to meet care leavers' needs.

Main findings

Care leavers now have stronger and more purposeful relationships with their personal advisors. Investment in additional staffing in the service is helping to reduce staff turnover and workloads. Care leavers in Cambridgeshire are supported by personal advisors who are mostly able to provide an account of care leavers' history and journey into care. Young people told inspectors they mostly see their personal advisors regularly and value the support and commitment they receive from them. Personal advisors act as strong and determined advocates for care leavers.

Personal advisors use kind and encouraging language to support and engage young people. They mostly visit young people with a frequency that meets their needs. Personal advisors use social media and other forms of contact to keep in touch with care leavers.

Personal advisors make determined efforts to help care leavers engage with their wider family members and community when this is appropriate. Young people are actively encouraged to engage in social activities and access local gyms.

Former unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people are offered sensitive support to meet their diverse needs and to support them with maintaining their accommodation and to access employment, education and training. When care leavers have experienced early trauma, this is understood and recognised by their personal advisors.

Pathways plans are mostly up to date and focused on the relevant issues for young people. Personal advisors write these plans to young people and ensure that they address essential information. However, not all young people receive copies of these

plans in a sufficiently timely way. Leaders know they have more to do to strengthen these plans further to ensure they are purposeful and aspirational plans that make a positive difference to care leavers' lives.

Most pathway plans address the most significant issues in young people's lives, but the resultant actions are not always sufficiently time bound. Plans make appropriate linkages to the local care leaver offer and identify how care leavers will access important documents such as birth certificates and passports. Partnership engagement in pathway planning is too variable, which means that needs around health and housing, for example, are not always fully planned for or addressed at the right time.

Most care leavers live in suitable accommodation that meets their needs. An increasing number of care leavers are supported to remain living with their current carers through effective 'staying put' arrangements.

As identified in the last inspection, sufficiency challenges mean that not all care leavers have a choice of accommodation or where their accommodation is located. This means that some care leavers are not always able to keep in close contact or live near those that know and care about them.

Complex housing pathways mean that some unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers, moving between cities, face accommodation uncertainty. Particularly proactive personal advisors help care leavers to navigate housing processes and systems in the absence of the prioritisation of care leavers' needs and effective planning with key partners.

Overall, while partnership working with local housing agencies has improved, accommodation options remain too limited, care leavers struggle to navigate complex and seemingly overly bureaucratic processes and are not always accorded appropriate prioritisation. While it is positive that local housing agencies have also adopted care leaving as a protected characteristic, translating this into effective corporate parenting and improved housing outcomes for care leavers remains a work in progress.

Since the last inspection, leaders have put in arrangements to oversee those care leavers placed in temporary or unsuitable accommodation and numbers have reduced. In emergencies, however, the local authority still uses this type of accommodation for a small minority of care leavers.

Leaders are ambitious to support care leavers into employment, further education and training opportunities and numbers overall have increased in the last 12 months. While these are small, incremental steps, the overall trajectory is positive. The local authority is trailblazing the use of bursaries for care leavers over 19, and this is supporting care leavers to remain longer in further education or giving care leavers

who wish to return to employment, education or training these opportunities at a time that suits them.

Leaders are developing important partnerships with key employers in the local area, helping young people to have a range of work experience opportunities and apprenticeships.

Although taking place at a suitable frequency, the quality and impact of case supervision is variable and does not always provide challenge or suitable professional curiosity as to what might be happening in care leavers' lives.

Management oversight of care leavers' records including risk assessments, safety plans and pathway plans lacks direction and impact. This means personal advisors are not always receiving sufficient direction or challenge in their work.

Leaders have taken decisive steps to refresh the corporate parenting strategy and have set out a detailed and more accessible local offer. With a renewed energy and focus, political and corporate leaders and care leavers have coproduced a convincing and aspirational pledge, which sets out their commitment to help care leavers fulfil their full potential.

Leaders have strengthened their line of sight into the service through their performance and quality assurance processes. Leaders know they have more to do to strengthen compliance in some areas of audit activity. Leaders are systematically creating the conditions for practice to strengthen and now have the foundations in place. Leaders know this now needs to accelerate at pace.

Personal advisors like working in Cambridgeshire. Positive improvements and a culture change are reported by the workforce. Personal advisors have access to a comprehensive training offer to support the development of their professional knowledge base and skill set.

Senior managers are reported to be visible and engaged, and this is valued and appreciated by staff.

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

Yours sincerely

Sophie Wales
His Majesty's Inspector