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Dear Sue

### **Focused visit to Slough Borough Council children's services**

This letter summarises the findings of the focused visit to Slough Borough Council children's services on 19 and 20 November 2025. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Christine Kennet, David Cohen and Penny Ademuyiwa.

Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for care leavers aged 18 to 25 years, in particular care leavers with specific needs, care leavers at risk of specific types of harm, staying close and in touch.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework.

### **Headline findings**

Care leavers in Slough are receiving an inconsistent level of support. For a significant number of young people, there has been a failure to keep in touch and ensure that those requiring support have an allocated personal adviser. This has had a negative impact on their access to services and their wellbeing and has failed to safeguard the welfare of some care leavers. Inspectors saw improvements in some areas of practice, such as in the impact of the virtual school, work with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who are now care leavers and in participation. However, keeping in touch with care leavers, pathway planning, recording, supervision, management oversight and support for the workforce remain significantly inconsistent.

### **Areas for priority action**

- Keeping in touch with and supporting care leavers over the age of 18 to ensure their welfare is safeguarded and promoted in line with statutory duties and care leaver entitlements. (outcome 4, national framework)

## **What needs to improve in this area of social work practice?<sup>1</sup>**

- Management oversight, including the supervision of staff. (enabler 2, national framework)
- Performance management and quality assurance arrangements. (enabler 2, national framework)
- The consistency of planning for care leavers. (enabler 3, national framework)
- How manageable workers' caseloads are, so that they have sufficient time to enable stronger and more consistent practice with care leavers. (enabler 2, national framework)

## **Main findings**

Inspectors saw some instances of practice from young people's advisers (YPAs) and the virtual school staff that showed a commitment to support care leavers' needs and to develop strong and nurturing relationships with them. However, YPAs' caseloads are too high, and they report that this, alongside duty tasks, means that some staff find their workload unmanageable. This makes it harder for YPAs to find the time they need to provide effective support to all care leavers, including visiting them at a frequency that meets their needs and ensuring that case recording and plans are always up to date and of a consistent quality.

The quality and timeliness of pathway plans are inconsistent. Pathway plans that are co-constructed with young people are generally better quality and represent young people's views well. However, some plans are not well matched to care leavers' needs and do not capture their hopes and wishes sufficiently clearly or accurately. Not all care leavers receive a copy of their pathway plan. YPAs have said that when they are busy, they prioritise visits with young people and do not always have time to update plans. This results in some pathway plans not being reviewed regularly or updated when young people's circumstances change. Consequently, work undertaken is not always based on an up-to-date needs assessment or plan.

The headteacher of the virtual school is an ardent advocate for care leavers who champions their aspirations and has facilitated the recruitment of care leaver apprentices into the service. An increase in the number of care leavers 18+ who are not in employment, education or training prompted the development of a young adult 18+ education, employment and training (EET) offer. This has been successful in increasing the number of care leavers in EET.

YPAs are generally supportive in helping young people to become more independent, and they find the right balance between support and encouragement while

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<sup>1</sup> The areas for improvement have been cross-referenced with the outcomes, enablers or principles in the [Children's Social Care: National Framework](#). This statutory guidance sets out the purpose, principles for practice and expected outcomes of children's social care.

facilitating young people to learn to live independently. Most young people have time to build relationships with their YPAs before they leave care. During this time, they are supported to prepare for independence through completing housing applications, applying for benefits and ensuring that they have the essential documents they need. However, for some care leavers, there are times when tasks have not been completed in a timely way, leaving young people waiting and with uncertainty.

Care leavers with allocated YPAs are generally well supported to make early housing applications, which give them priority for housing in Slough. In April 2025, a housing operational group was set up in Slough to ensure that care leavers have access to suitable accommodation that meets their needs and to develop pathways to ensure that they are supported. However, it is too soon to evidence sustained positive impact.

Most, but not all, young people are visited regularly and in line with their pathway planning and needs. YPAs who were spoken to told us that they have regular contact with their allocated care leavers through calls, texts and messages via apps in between visits. Reports of visits are written sensitively to young people, which will be a positive record for them if they return to read and understand their records in the future.

While some YPAs are proactive in creating opportunities to engage with their care leavers and stay connected with them, not all care leavers have experienced this. Although some young people over 21 who have requested ongoing help do receive continued support, this is not the case for all care leavers. This is creating an inconsistent service offer for young people.

A significant number of care leavers aged 18 to 21 have had their cases prematurely closed to the service, or they do not have an allocated YPA. As a result, some care leavers have not received the support they are entitled to, some for a number of years, and some may not even be aware that they are entitled to support. This has led to their welfare not being safeguarded and promoted. While leaders recognised this deficiency earlier in the year, a lack of decisive management oversight and intervention means that a considerable number of care leavers are still not aware of their entitlements or receiving the support they need.

The lead unaccompanied asylum-seeking practitioner brings specialist knowledge and expertise in this area and provides consultation to social workers and YPAs about immigration, age assessments, disputes and the importance of triple planning. To enable them to support colleagues in their work with unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people, they hold a protected caseload.

The individual needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers that relate to their ethnicity, culture, language and religion are well met and considered along with their wider wishes and feelings. Support is quickly put in place to help young people's understanding of their entitlements and to quickly enrol them on English for speakers of other languages courses to help them learn language skills.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who are now care leavers in Slough are well supported until their immigration status is settled. They are then offered support to secure more permanent housing if they are granted asylum. However, YPAs report feeling frustration when young people are placed in accommodation outside of the area because they begin to settle, make friends and start college, and when they have to move back to Slough for priority housing, this disrupts their progress in feeling settled.

Most care leavers in custody are in regular contact with their YPAs and receive their financial entitlements, including regular subsistence and celebration payments. YPAs are mostly persistent in ensuring that their needs are met while in custody and plan for their release effectively.

There has been some managerial change in recent years and a very recent reorganisation, which some YPAs have struggled with. Some YPAs remain positive about their work environment. However, other YPAs say that they do not feel that their manager is available or providing the level of guidance and support they need. While some staff report responsive managers, others report low morale and a demanding working environment. The recent restructure has resulted in the reallocation of YPAs to different teams, and some YPAs have struggled with a change in managers, approach and expectations of work. Some staff say that there is inequity of work and that they feel overwhelmed by their workload.

Supervisions are inconsistent. Some stronger examples were seen, but a significant number of others had repeated actions and limited critical reflection. Consequently, some staff feel that they do not receive the direction, oversight and time to reflect on their practice. This is needed to help ensure that they are consistently doing the best they can to provide timely and effective support to care leavers.

There is an audit framework in place. Most audits are collaborative conversations with practitioners, and most of the audits helpfully identify stronger practice and areas where improvement is needed. The impact of audits is inconsistent for children, practitioners and learning for the authority. There is limited evidence of recommendations being made about improving wider practice as a result of the audit activity, and feedback from young people and professionals from partner agencies is not regularly being sought. In stronger audits, there is clearer reflection on organisational learning that will improve support for young people and develop YPAs' practice. The current approach is not embedded and is not consistent across all audits. While audits are referred to in some supervision records, there is no effective tracking of actions to ensure that findings result in a positive impact on young people.

The Slough Academy is a positive development and has helped support workforce stability and learning offers. A recent review has brought further recommendations to move beyond delivering training towards wider transformation to embed the restorative practice framework, strengthen evaluation and reporting and build leadership pathways. However, although the local authority makes sure that the

YPAs are aware of the practice model and the training offer, their high caseloads restrict their ability to fully engage or make sufficient time for training and development.

We met an inspirational group of young people during this visit, who have told us that they do feel listened to and included in participation, such as bringing their voices to the corporate parenting panel. Overall, those young people we spoke to are positive about their YPAs, their accommodation and the individual support they receive.

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

We have notified the Department for Education of the area for priority action. You should submit an action plan that responds to this area within 70 working days of receiving this letter. It would be very helpful if you can share an early draft of the action plan with us within 20 working days of receiving this letter.

Yours sincerely

Christine Kennet  
**His Majesty's Inspector**