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Dear Mr Anthony

Focused visit to Barnet children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the focused visit to Barnet children's services on 4 and 5 November 2025. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Rodica Cobarzan and Michele Henry.

Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for care leavers, with a particular focus on the support provided to younger care leavers as they transition into adulthood. This included consideration of services for disabled care leavers, those who have physical or mental health needs, and those affected by alcohol or drugs. We also considered the quality and suitability of accommodation provided for care leavers.

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

Headline findings

Care leavers continue to be a high priority in Barnet. The recently appointed director of children's services has maintained a strong focus on building on the strengths found at the last inspection in June 2024, which rated the service good, and driving further improvements in partnership working and support for care leavers. Leaders and partner agencies are taking proactive steps to strengthen and improve communication and support for care leavers at key transition points. A wide range of services is helping most children move successfully into adulthood, and a more coordinated approach is developing for young people who are particularly vulnerable. Leaders recognise that there is still more to do to fully embed these arrangements.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice?¹

- How consistently care leavers, particularly the most vulnerable, are well supported to move into new accommodation in a planned way (outcome 4, national framework).
- The quality of pathway planning for more vulnerable care leavers, so that it consistently identifies and addresses the complexity of individual experiences and current risks (outcome 4, national framework).

Main findings

Most care leavers get to know their personal adviser (PA) sufficiently early to allow relationship-building before they become adults. Experienced and motivated PAs provide kind and consistent support to care leavers. Through regular visits, contact and ongoing communication, they build positive relationships and offer both practical and emotional support to help care leavers successfully move towards independence.

Young people who spoke with the inspectors were overwhelmingly positive about the support they receive from their social workers or PAs, describing their experiences as 'perfect' and 'amazing'.

Care leavers benefit from access to a dedicated hub, which provides further opportunities to build relationships beyond their allocated PAs. The hub makes it easier for young people to access support from the wider team and from the other services, including Barnet Education and Learning Service (BELS), as well as therapeutic support.

Care leavers are helped to maintain contact or reconnect with family and friends, who they identify as important to their well-being. This approach helps to reduce the risk of isolation and promotes a sense of belonging and stability.

The service provides a wide range of opportunities for care leavers to participate in activities and service developments. This includes involvement in recruitment interviews, contributing to service improvement initiatives, and taking part in enrichment activities. These opportunities not only allow care leavers to influence decisions that affect them but they also help them build friendships, develop new skills and have fun.

Most care leavers are supported well to develop independent living skills in line with their individual abilities. A range of structured accredited programmes is provided to ensure that young people acquire the practical and emotional skills that they will need to transition successfully into independent adult life. This support ensures that,

¹ 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.

for most young people, transitions are managed effectively, and they are well prepared to live independently and confidently.

More intensive planning takes place to help young people with disabilities, additional needs, or vulnerabilities in preparation for their transition to adulthood. This work is mostly completed jointly between children's and adult services to ensure that appropriate support is in place as the young person moves to adulthood. However, for a smaller number of care leavers, it is not always clear what assessments have been completed about their independent living skills, what support they need or how ready they are to live independently. As a result, some young people are moving into independent accommodation without sufficient planning, making it harder for them to succeed. Nevertheless, some of these gaps are covered through a range of floating support after young people move, which is helping them to settle.

Care leavers are supported to attend medical appointments, with PAs actively promoting their access to health services. PAs mostly take a proactive approach to referring care leavers to specialist services when necessary. This ensures that care leavers can access and engage in support that they need for their mental health, or with services to support them to tackle any difficulties they have with drugs and alcohol. Many care leavers access dedicated mental health provision that is available through Barnet Integrated Clinical Services (BICS) and through commissioned services. This allows them to quickly access specialist support. However, changes in therapists can disrupt the continuity of care and affect their relationships with services.

Most pathway plans are comprehensive and take account of care leavers' individual needs, with particular attention given to their cultural backgrounds, identities and personal histories. Plans reflect an understanding of care leavers' heritage, language and beliefs, and PAs sensitively explore and celebrate these in the plans. Care leavers' views are recorded well in these plans and, for most care leavers, risks and vulnerabilities are explored well. However, for a smaller number of young people, plans are not always updated to reflect current risks, or they do not reflect the complexity of young people's individual experiences and how this may affect their progress. This can weaken the understanding of these care leavers' needs and risks, and the support they require.

Most care leavers live in safe and suitable accommodation that meets their individual needs. Care leavers' housing needs are prioritised in Barnet, and extensive work at a corporate level supports this approach. The established joint housing protocol and the developing corporate parenting strategy continue to place the needs of care leavers at the forefront of the council's priorities. However, for some care leavers, particularly those living in temporary accommodation, the process of moving can feel unsettling. Accommodation is allocated and young people do not always have the opportunity to view their new homes before moving in. This can affect their initial sense of comfort, stability and security. PAs recognise these challenges and work effectively to support care leavers, helping them to personalise their homes and

supporting them to feel better about where they live. Leaders are aware of these challenges, and they have plans to further develop the housing offer for young people.

Some young people are supported to stay with their former foster carers through 'staying put' arrangements. This helps them maintain stability and continue receiving valuable guidance and support.

The local offer has been revised and co-produced with care leavers, making it clear, accessible and informative. A summary provides young people with the details they require to understand the support available to them. PAs are knowledgeable about the full range of support available, and they work proactively to help care leavers access the services they need. A variety of activities and opportunities are offered to help young people stay engaged, supported and active. This includes discounted offers, which young people are keen to take advantage of.

PAs speak about their positive experiences of working in Barnet. They particularly value the opportunities available to support and reflect on their practice, which enable them to continue developing in their roles.

The frequency and quality of supervision generally help PAs to respond effectively to young people's needs. However, in a small number of records, supervision does not consistently support practitioners to fully understand or follow through on decisions and actions from one supervision session to the next.

Leaders have taken steps in response to the findings of the last ILACS inspection in 2024, to strengthen support for young people transitioning to adulthood. Several panels have been introduced to review transitions. These panels provide an additional level of scrutiny, enabling careful analysis of risks and vulnerabilities, and supporting planning to address them. This added scrutiny is proving important in prompting reflection about the support that young people require and in ensuring that decisions made for them are both safe and appropriate. While these panels are still in their early stages, work is ongoing to achieve consistency and to ensure that all young people receive an equivalent level of scrutiny and support.

Audits provide a mostly accurate measure of the quality of practice, and they help to identify areas for improvement. However, the voices of young people and the views of practitioners are not fully considered in some of these audits.

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

Yours sincerely

Rodica Cobarzan
His Majesty's Inspector