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Preparation for Adulthood Improvement Plan

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Introduction

At each stage of their learning and development, children and young people need to be prepared for the new responsibilities, new experiences, new opportunities and the new risks associated with the next stage. From a child learning to make choices about food and friends, to a young person making choices about education, training or employment, becoming an adult is a significant change for all young people, and involves preparing for more independence and making plans for the future.

For families of young people with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), this can be a particularly anxious and challenging time which needs more careful preparation and planning than for other young people of a similar age. With the right support at the right time, a smooth transition to adulthood can be achieved.

Preparing for adulthood (PFA) is the steps we take to enable young people with SEND to:

- Enjoy living a meaningful, independent, and fulfilling life as possible.
- Achieve as much as they possibly can.

The SEND Code of Practice states:

7.38 Preparing for adulthood means preparing for:

- *higher education and/or employment – this includes exploring different employment options, such as support for becoming self-employed and help from supported employment agencies.*
- *independent living – this means young people having choice, control and freedom over their lives and the support they have, their accommodation and living arrangements, including supported living.*
- *participating in society, including having friends and supportive relationships, and participating in, and contributing to, the local community*
- *being as healthy as possible in adult life.*

Vision

Liverpool's vision for preparing children and young people for adulthood is for them to feel valued, able to make their own decisions about matters that affect them, be a healthy and equal member of their local community and able to make a positive contribution within their family and community.

A more joined up approach, clearer pathways and stronger links between children's and adult services and preparation for adulthood being seen in the context of a whole life approach to building skills and resilience, is necessary to improve young people's experience of transition to adulthood and their outcomes.

Preparation for Adulthood is one of the five priorities of Liverpool's SEND strategy 2023-2026 and the cornerstone to enabling a healthy and thriving community.

The Journey so Far.

Following a SEND inspection in February 2021 a Preparation for Adulthood evaluation event with young people, parents, carers and professionals took place later that year. Feedback indicated there was a lot of knowledge about how to prepare young people for adult life, but no consistent approach.

A PFA strategy was drafted and identified the need to have a working group to drive forward changes with workstreams focussing on the 4 PFA domains, the curriculum teaching for PFA and a data dashboard to monitor performance.

During 2023 two PFA strategy meetings and one stakeholder engagement event took place. Following a PFA strategy meeting in January 2024 agreement for the group to be co-chaired by Liverpool's Designated Social Care Officer for SEND was agreed.

A self-audit of current areas of strength and challenge, aligning to the four PFA domains- Independent living, Community inclusion, Being Healthy and Employment, Education, and Further training, was undertaken, with four subgroups created to complete the task.

Membership of the subgroups included representatives from children's and adult social care, SENISS, educational psychology, post 16 colleges, special schools, the SEN case work team, and health. Representation from mainstream secondary schools is needed given the numbers of children and young people with SEND they support.

Summary of WORKING GROUP Findings

What's working well:

Increasing the numbers of young people with SEND are going on to supported internships, with more gaining employment from this, or going on to further education. Liverpool's Annual SEND SEF, completed in April 24, noted 67 supported internships for this academic year with a projected 120 for the 2024/25.

A supported internship pilot is being extended to young people with SEND who do not have an EHCP and is due for evaluation by the DfE in March 2025, following which we hope it will continue.

Liverpool City region's "Supported Employment Forum" has been relaunched, with representatives from the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) linked in to provide advice to schools, job coaches and parent/carers. All Secondary schools are able and encouraged to join, with DWP wanting to extend this further so they can play a more proactive role in the provision of advice and guidance to schools regarding post school career options.

Children's and Adult social care have restructured, each now having their own first point of contact. The Children's Advice and Support Service have; alongside the Police, Health and Early Help; representation from Housing, a SEN social care needs advice officer and increased investment in staffing. Whilst adult social care has Well-Being officers and a multi-Disciplinary team that can provide advice, guidance and short term support.

The Adult services - "Preparing for Adulthood" team has been part of Adult Social Care transformation. They are now accepting referrals for young people between the

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age of 14 and 17 setting a performance target that all young people will have their care needs assessed and eligibility determined before they reach 18, so a seamless transition between children's and adults is achieved for those who have eligible adult social care needs. And for those who do not, signposting them to services that may be able to help them can be done prior to them reaching adulthood.

The "Transition and Leaving Care" panel meets monthly to track progress, provide advice and evaluate outcomes of care planning for children and young people in care as they approach adulthood and has a representative from Adult Social Care. The Preparing for Adulthood team; are also co located with the Disabled Children's Social Work team and meet monthly with them and Fusion Short breaks, to do the same for children and young people with more profound and complex SEN and Disabilities.

More recently in addition to the above, since October 2024, Adult social care are launching monthly ½ day drop in sessions for children's social care workers to discuss specific young people, monthly operational managers meeting to identify vulnerable young people who may benefit from a referral to Adult social care so an early Care Act assessment can be completed, and will launching PFA hubs that will provide key information and advice to parents carers and young people regarding preparing for adulthood. Details of the PFA process and pathway can be found in the appendices of this report.

There has been investment in the Family Hub model; which for children and young people with SEND applies up to the age of 25 years of age; meaning young people and their parents' carers can access advice on a range of issues, including welfare benefits and housing.

There is a clear and well-established transition pathway for young people continuing care needs that's understood by professionals in both social care and health. In addition, adult social care has a continuing care practice manager who can advise and support practitioners through the process.

Alder hey have a "10 steps to transition" pathway that's well established and understood by professionals within the Trust.

The Local Offer has easy to read fact sheets about the Care Act and Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and a 16-25 page that provides some information about supported internships, adult social care, housing adaptations and benefits advice.

Areas for improvement

Schools

There are inconsistent approaches to inclusion within schools with too much emphasis on a child young person's difficulties and challenges and not enough on their outcomes and how they can be achieved. Pupils are not always included in their EHC reviews, and the PFA section of the EHCP is either not being completed or is vague with outcomes not measurable. (see Dip sample audit – Appendix 1)

Staff knowledge of how preparing young people with SEND for adulthood is different and of post 16 college and career options available, was limited and whilst there was some good use of pupil profiles and capturing the pupil voice within some EHC plans this was not consistent.

The young persons aspiration is not used as the golden thread as intended in the Children and Family Act 2014 and is not reviewed effectively at annual reviews for affirmation or changes to their aspirations.

Post 16 providers.

Colleges are not always specific about their transition process and what additional support they offer as part of their provision and being "college ready" and what this means is unclear and not incorporated into transition planning at the annual review. In addition, courses can be pulled last minute if there is a lack of uptake.

Children's & Adults Social Care

Children in care are not as well prepared for adulthood despite having an IRO and a pathway planning process that prompts feedback and accountability in all areas relevant to this.

PEPs do identify there is an EHCP but often don't cross reference it. PFA is not clear and targets are often not SMART. A further thematic audit of PEPs would be useful to inform and shape improvements.

Housing options for care leavers and young people with SEND cannot be accessed until they are 18, leaving no time for preparation and transition.

Knowledge of what is available locally in our communities for young people with SEND is not widely known or captured within the Local Offer.

Young people's voice in decision making at 16 plus is not consistently evident and assessments regarding a young person's capacity to make their own decisions, are not completed for those who concerns about this exist.

There are marked differences in how children's and adult services manage risk. Children's services have a tendency to focus on containment of risk without properly helping young people to address and explore and understand the consequences of risk. Adult services focus on capacity to make decisions, including "bad decisions" a model of self-determination, so become risk tolerant.

Children Looked after and Care Leavers

A recent analysis by the SEND QA Lead on our Children looked after and our care leavers (age 18-25) identified a significant number 39 (5% of care Leavers), who have an EHCP, of that 39 15 (38%) were currently in Education Employment or Training (EET) leaving 24 (62%) who are Not in Education or Training (NEET).

Further analysis reported there were 51 care leavers who were NEET, who had an EHCP in the past, but it had been ceased.

It is not an unreasonable hypothesis that the EHCP had not been as effective as it could have been if the outcome post 18 is to become NEET. This challenges whether we are giving sufficient focus to PFA and are we joining up EHCP with Pathway planning (see separate report: Quality Assurance Report SEND - Data Analysis of Children Looked After and Care Leavers with an EHCP)

Further analysis and data checks are needed to ensure there is a full understanding of who is in this cohort and whether it includes those with long term care needs, as well as the wider NEET cohort, so we can identify how many of these have or have had an EHCP.

Health

Within acute health settings staff are not consistently trained to understand and meet the diverse needs of our young people with SEND once they reach 16 plus.

The age a young person is deemed an adult also varies depending on the setting – for example in A&E at Alder Hey children's hospital they will not accept young people aged 16 or over, yet CAMHS will sometimes keep young people open until they are 18.

A learning disability workshop run by Liverpool's DCO in November 2023 highlighted that in respect of people with learning difficulties, terminology and emphasis varies greatly across children's and adults. Anecdotally it was shared that children's health professionals will refer to "global developmental delay" to describe a child/young person's need related to a learning difficulty, often not pursuing a diagnosis of learning disability for those whom it is apparent they have significant learning needs. The use of the term "learning difficulty" and "learning disability" is also used interchangeably within children's and can be assumed to mean the same thing when this may not be the case. This becomes problematic in adults as access to annual health checks for people with Learning Disabilities and any support from a Community Learning Disability team requires an individual to have a diagnosed learning disability, and if this is not evident, regardless of whether a child has attended a school for children with significant learning needs, they will need to have their needs cognition and learning assessed again.

And finally for looked after children and care leavers, other than a few questions within their pathway plan, any way of measuring whether young people are making progress towards taking ownership of managing their own health needs independently, is not evident.

Recommendations.

Below is an overview of recommendations from the 4 subgroups.

- Community Inclusion
 - Independent living
 - Being Healthy
 - Employment/Education & training.
1. Co-producing a range of documents with parents/carers and young people to better capture pupil voice about matters relevant to supporting them to prepare for adult life, having these discussions much earlier through adopting a whole life approach to PFA, measuring whether young people are routinely participating in their reviews and regular workshops and training for SENCOs (and other professionals) on how to gather pupil voice, will support a more child centric approach.
 2. Creating a dynamic LCC Vocational Passports to support young people with transition into work or further/higher education.
 3. Devising a protocol to support transition planning from one setting to another ie school to a post 16 provider.
 4. Developing resources to promote workforce confidence in communicating with profoundly disabled children and young people and locating these centrally within the council's learning hub and/or social work academy/workforce development unit.
 5. Ensuring residential and foster carer providers understand the principles of PFA and this being evident in their recruitment, training and appraisal. PFA to also be developed within our commissioning framework. Fostering QA audits captures compliance, quality and impact.
 6. PFA guide for young people and their parents' carers to be produced and reviewed annually. This would detail all information relevant for preparing for adulthood, so families know where to go for advice and support.
 7. Developing PFA practice standards so consistency and accountability across the partnership can be embedded, with a data dashboard/score card that tracks performance in key agreed areas.

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8. Incorporating social skills, mental health and well-being into the Employability Skills Curriculum for schools/colleges.
9. SEND information sessions/coffee mornings to be rolled out within LCC schools each term, facilitated by adult and children's social care, DWP, post 16 college, supported internships, housing and health.
10. Creation of a PFA toolkit to help education settings, social care professionals and parents' carers support young people to develop independence and essential life skills.
11. Develop an audit framework for PFA and undertake regular multi agency peer audits of Young People who have been through transition.
12. Briefings on MCA & Care Act eligibility and referral pathways to ASC to be rolled out.
13. MCA guidance to support consistency in completion of mental capacity assessments and Children's services to have its own MCA template, to be devised.
14. The SEND Partnership board, reviews PFA activity and impact annually, whilst tracking performance data quarterly by a refreshed scorecard.
15. Task and finish progress updates are provided to PCG.
16. The PFA Improvement plan is co-ordinated and accountable to the Transformational and Improvement workstreams.

Next Steps/Actions

To begin to achieve the above, creation of six Task and Finish groups, each with its own terms of reference and set of objectives, will help us make progress in a graduated and systematic way, to ensure we embed changes and practice across the partnership.

Task group 1 – EHCP, Reviews & PFA toolkit

1. The first Task and Finish group will evaluate and amend the EHCP paperwork to ensure PFA outcomes and provision is clearly articulated, specific, relevant and measurable within a young person's plan and professionals and families are accountable for supporting the young person to work towards these.

2. Following on from the above the same group will develop a tiered Preparing for Adulthood toolkit so support provided is appropriate and based on the young person's need, as this will enable progress to be evidenced so young people can develop essential life skills and know how and when to apply them in real life contexts. Ensuring there is a shared understanding of language and meaning is crucial to this being successful so young people can build on their skills rather than repeat the same tasks over. The 10 outcomes of the Care Act will be used as a guide when developing this toolkit as it will enable us to identify if young people are indicating eligible adult social care need.

Task Group 2 – Independent Travel

1. A second Task and Finish Group will focus on Independent Travel and Accessing the Community, initially evaluating current referral processes into the travel training team, it's reach and outcomes to determine how successful their interventions are in enabling young people to be able to independently travel, use public transport and get around in their communities safely. The role of assisted technologies and initiatives such as a "vulnerable person's card" alongside designated spaces, places and phone numbers would be explored through liaison with public transport providers, local businesses and groups, to provide vulnerable adults with a number of options they can use if they need help when accessing the community independently.

Task Group 3 – PFA Joint Commissioning

1. A third Task and Finish group would involve Joint commissioning across children's and adults to explore ways we could utilise community services and venues already in existence to promote the inclusion and provision of meaningful activity for our young people with SEND in their communities. Scoping out what is currently available, its accessibility, use and where it is advertised would be the starting point, following which engagement with providers, services and social enterprises; for example, family hubs, libraries, colleges, social enterprises, housing etc, that could be used to support work experience, developing independent living skills and supporting peer/social relationships, would be undertaken with the help of commissioning to engage our stakeholders.

Task Group 4 – PFA QA & Audit

1. A fourth Task and Finish group would evaluate our performance in supporting young people's preparation for adult life through creation of a PFA audit tool and data dashboard that aligns to the 4 PFA domains (or more if domains need breaking down into sub domains) to provide intelligence regarding areas of good practice, gaps, challenges and key themes. In addition, this group will review and develop training in Care Act eligibility and Mental capacity -how and when to assess- to ensure our workforce are knowledgeable, skilled and competent in understanding and applying principles of eligibility and assumed capacity in a manner that is realistic in terms of expectations, promotes choice, but also recognises vulnerabilities where they are apparent and knows how to flag them as a concern.

Task Group 5 Health PFA

1. A fifth Task and Finish group for health, for them to evaluate their performance in supporting young people's preparation for adult life in respect of any specific health needs, requires further discussion with health colleagues. Health has many disciplines and transition pathways for each. Understanding what these are, how they monitor their performance, areas of good practice and challenge and deciding whether this detail needs to be known, will be discussed with Liverpool's DCO.

Task Group 6 – PFA Guides

1. A sixth to coproduce a PFA guide for Young People Parents and Carers.
2. Collate the completed work of the other the Task and Finish to inform the guide.
3. To collate and evaluate PFA guides from other Local Authorities to establish a Liverpool agreement of "what a good one looks like".

Appendix 1

PFA year 9 dip sample audit.



Report Year 9 PFA
audit Aug 2024 Draft



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