

Report of Director of Children and Families

Report to Executive Board

Date: 21st November 2018

Subject: Support for Care leavers



Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. Care Leavers remain one of the most vulnerable groups in society, and one for whom Local Authorities bare a special responsibility as 'Corporate Parents'. Outcomes for Care Leavers throughout their life are generally much worse than the population as a whole – they are far more likely to be unemployed, to become homeless, to be in prison and suffer poor mental and physical health than their peers.
2. Leeds has a strong track record of support for Care Leavers in Leeds, better than is seen in most other cities, counties and boroughs. Leeds was a pilot for the Staying Put initiative which enables care leavers to remain with their foster carers to the age of 21 and now have 61 young people in staying put arrangements in the city. OfSTED judged services for Care Leavers as 'Good' in 2015. A key part of this judgement was the way that the whole Council had supported joined up efforts to improve the lives of Care Leavers – for example around jobs or access to leisure facilities, and how the Council had worked proactively with its partners through Child Friendly Leeds to leverage extra support from business, voluntary sector and other public sector organisations. Another important part of the success was the

effective way that we had worked to engage young people, through the Care Leaver Council and in other ways, to involve them in shared learning and helping to lead developing our services.

3. Leeds' approach has been a national example of good practice but that does not mean there is not more to do. Outcomes for these young people, whilst improved and better than many other Council areas, are still far below their peers. In addition the government has now raised national ambitions with new legislation and national programmes that in some cases borrow from some of Leeds' recent work, meaning that Leeds now needs further innovation and improvement to continue to lead.
4. The new responsibilities from government are as follows: The Local Authority has new responsibilities to:
 - Extend the availability of Personal Advisor support to care leavers aged 25 (previously this was 21yrs)
 - Have regard to the 7 Corporate Parenting Principles
 - Consult and publish our 'local Care Leaver Offer'
5. The Council's commitment to be the Best City for Children and Young People to grow up in, and the government guidance's question 'would this be good enough for my child?' pose a significant challenge – how can Leeds become the Best City for Care Leavers? We know this will be better not just for these young people for whom we are responsible but better for the public purse – help for care leavers will help avoid the potential future costs of high rates of poor health, unemployment, crime and homelessness.
6. Children's Social Work Services have reviewed the range of services and support to care leavers to ensure that services remain relevant and in the best place to meet changing demands of our care leaver cohort. We are continuing to work collaboratively with partners and care leavers to ensure that our offer of support best meets the needs of those requiring support. Key areas for improvement include: developing a 'One Stop Shop' approach to support co-delivery and better access to core partners providing relevant services; supporting Care Leavers to manage ongoing welfare reform; and continuing improvements to support for housing, education and work.
7. As part of the city's shared aim for Leeds to be the Best City for Children and Young People and for Leeds to be a Child Friendly City it is vital that our ambitions for Care Leavers continue to be high – these are often vulnerable young people for whom the whole Council has important legal, moral and parental duties. As such, Leeds is determined to work above and beyond the national minimum requirements

– to look at how the city can develop support that extends as long as it is needed – not just to age 25, and to use the city’s commitment to restorative, strengths-based approaches to trial new ways of working that help build and sustain supportive social networks around Care Leavers.

Recommendations

8. That the Executive Board:
9. Notes the strong track record of Leeds’ support within our offer to care leavers and supports the direction and intentions to engage wider partners, services and stake holders in enhancing these services, including a whole Council commitment to improving outcomes for Care Leavers.
10. Confirms it supports our ambition to not only deliver the new national standards, but to go further to support our Care Leavers as long as they need that support.
11. Supports a Whole Council commitment for Care Leavers, with a clear and specific commitment from each Directorate setting out how they will work to promote better outcomes for care leavers and support the shared principle of collective responsibility when answering ‘would this be good enough for my child’.
12. Approves the Care Leavers Offer, the details of which are set out in this report.
13. Notes the Head of Service for Children Looked After is responsible for implementing the recommendations of this report.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Board with an update on local and national ambitions to improve the lives of Care Leavers, and to seek the Board's support for the ongoing work to improve support for Leeds' Care Leavers.

2 Background information

'Services for care leavers are good. Strong multi-agency partnerships have significantly improved outcomes in education, employment and training. Accommodation with former foster carers or in independent living is suitable and safe. They are well supported by tenacious staff.' (OfSTED Leeds Inspection, 2015)

- 2.1 As the quote above shows, Leeds has had considerable success in improving help for Care Leavers in recent years. An important part of this progress has been due to the way the Council has worked across its own directorates to support Care Leavers and how it has worked well in partnership with both statutory partners and others in business and the voluntary sector through Child Friendly Leeds.
- 2.2 Since 2015 the Children and Families Directorate has continued to improve its own services and has continued to work with partners to develop better joined up support. This year the Directorate has restructured its services to create a standalone Care Leavers Service, with the aim of increasing focus on the needs of these young people and supporting better management grip and professional development.
- 2.3 Central government is also making welcome efforts to promote better support for Care Leavers. In July 2016 the government set out its strategy for ensuring support to care leavers within its report ['Keep on caring'](#). Following the implementation of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 new responsibilities were placed on Local Authorities to extend the support they provide to care leavers to include care leavers up to 25 years old requesting it. Throughout this time there has been much publicity and campaigning to raise the awareness of the disadvantages that many care leavers experience growing up as young adults often with limited support networks and access to continuing care.
- 2.4 In addition to the increased right for care leavers to request Personal Advisor support up unto the age of 25, the Children and Social Work Act 2017 also established for the first time seven Corporate Parenting Principles which apply to children looked after and young people. The Act also established the requirement for local authorities to consult on and publish its 'local offer' to care leavers.
- 2.5 In Leeds we have long established core principles set out in 'Our Promises' to children in our care and Care leavers. The now statutory 'Corporate Parenting Principles', set out within the Children and Social Work Act 2017 follow our approach. These principles are set in recognition that in order to thrive, children

and young people have certain key needs that good parents generally meet. We are required as a local authority to have regard to the seven Corporate Parenting Principles when exercising any of our functions in relation to Children Looked After and young people, as follows:

- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people
- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
- To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
- For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

2.6 Care leavers continue to be more at risk of poor outcomes across their life course than the general population. National reports state almost a quarter of the adult prison population⁽¹⁾, almost half of young men under 21 in the criminal justice system have spent time in care, 25% of homeless people have been in care⁽²⁾ and only 6% of care leavers move into higher education⁽³⁾.

3 Main issues

Meeting and exceeding the new statutory requirements for Care Leavers

3.1 The Council's commitment to be the Best City for Children and Young People to grow up in, and the government guidance's question 'would this be good enough for my child?' pose a significant challenge – how can Leeds become the Best City for Care Leavers? The challenge is to not merely meet new statutory requirements but to use the strengths of the Council, Children and Families' Services and the city as whole to make sure that every care leaver benefits from

the very best help to make the transition to be a happy, healthy and successful adult.

- 3.2 Since the start of the year we have undertaken an in-service review of our structures and arrangements for supporting care leavers. Building on an already strong model of close working with partners and those accessing our services we undertook a review of processes including holding a multi-agency 'Outcome Based Accountabilities' event in April this year with representatives from a wide range of statutory and voluntary sector organisations; meeting with our Care Leaver Council; specific consultations with staff and care leavers to consider support - including financial support to help inform our offer and service design for the future. We continue to maintain close working links between the Care Leaver Council and our Corporate Parenting Board which ensures that consultation and communication is established as an ongoing process, which will enable us to continually review and tailor our services to reflect feedback and care leaver experience. The consultation process has been invaluable in shaping the way that the Council will now work with young people leaving care up to the age of 25, how to publish the Offer, and has helped determine how we will deal with Council Tax and financial support; and helped identify areas where we want to further develop the Care Leaver Offer over future years – e.g. extending support beyond 25; developing peer and community support networks; and considering additional support with transport costs.
- 3.3 Leeds has also been approached to join five other local authorities as 'champion' authorities working with Spectra First, a national organisation appointed by government to develop and deliver the [National Care Leaver Covenant](#). Through this work we aim to engage national organisations to support the aspirations set out in the covenant to build a strong community of support around all care leavers. Building on our city's success in establishing a strong network of 'Child Friendly Ambassadors' we have also been able to engage a significant number of local organisations, employers and supporters all eager to help us extend our support arrangements and opportunities for our care leavers in the city.
- 3.4 The requirement to publish our local offer ensures that all our care leavers are able to access the information they need in respect of their rights and entitlements and also access help. The new statutory duty was designed to make sure that Councils made more effort to clarify the wide range of support that Care Leavers are entitled. The guidance sets out a requirement that our published offer specifically provides information regarding services and support for Health and Wellbeing, Relationships, Education and Training, Employment, Accommodation and Participation in society. Through discussion with our Care Leaver Council we have agreed that the most effective way of publishing our offer and maintaining its relevance and currency is to update our existing offer set out in our Youth Information Hub web pages. The Offer is a summary of all the existing support available to Care Leavers in Leeds. See link below:
<https://www.leeds.gov.uk/youthinformationHub/care-leavers>

- 3.5 Our existing obligations to support care leavers place a proactive duty on the local authority to keep in touch with all our care leavers between the ages of 18 and 21, though of course there is no obligation on our care leavers to access or engage with our offer of support and services. Through extending our offer to support care leavers who request support between 21 and 25 we have assessed that much, though of course not all, of the support requests may relate to the need for advice and assistance with accommodation and rights and entitlements to benefits. In anticipation of the impact on Care Leavers from the recent implementation of Universal Credit, we have reviewed our policies and guidance in relation to this area.
- 3.6 Despite our developments and local performance with regards to services for our carer leavers, as set out above at 2.6, nationally outcomes for care leavers remain poor. Our effort to ensure that our care leavers are supported to achieve the best possible outcomes requires a whole council approach and each Department in the authority is asked to commit to support our Corporate Parenting responsibilities by working with the Care Leavers Service to recognise and commit to this collective responsibility.

4 Corporate Considerations

- 4.1 Members of the Executive Board may be aware of a national campaign to advocate for the exemption of Council Tax liability for all care leavers. Through our work within the National Bench Marking Forum, where we hold a seat on this national steering group advising on care leavers services, we understand that approximately 50 local authorities have reviewed their council tax arrangements to support care leavers in a variety of ways including some form of exemptions (or repayment mechanism for care leavers in respect of council tax).
- 4.2 Our own assessment and review of this proposal, which has included discussions with care leavers, has been to conclude that a 'blanket' waiver or exemption from council tax is not proportionate, appropriate or necessary. A more flexible and needs led approach will instead be used, as set out below.
- 4.3 Our approach in Leeds is to work with our care leavers and not to do to or do for. This is to ensure that we empower and promote successful independence. That said we are also committed to doing all we can to prevent our care leavers from falling into difficulty and we have therefore established our policy to enable access to support, including financial support, where required. Our services are structured in recognition that our adult care leavers have rights as stakeholders, and where appropriate tax payers, which are important principles of rights and responsibilities within our local political systems. To treat all care leavers the same in terms of any exemption risks failing to recognise that some are able, and may well desire, to meet their council tax obligations, whereas others may struggle. Our arrangements have therefore been to put in place a mechanism whereby any care leaver up to the age of 25 who needs support with meeting the costs of council tax are able to access this. We have ensured that this mechanism is fully publicised as part of our published Local Offer to Care Leavers

5 Next steps

- 5.1 Having now reconfigured our services to establish a single Care Leavers Service we are now in the process of developing our delivery model to include the existing arrangements of access to Personal Advisors, who work directly with care leavers primarily between the ages of 17 ½ to 21, and now potentially 25, and also ensuring access to a range of specialist support services providing direct support based on specific needs and requests for service. Working together with our Care Leaver Council we have committed to keep under constant review our 'Offer' as published in the Youth Information Hub and ensure that we respond to requests for additional information, ideas and opportunities. Our Care Leavers Council have agreed to provide a role of regularly reviewing and 'youth proofing' our published offer and through the established links agreed between the city's Corporate Parenting Board, the Head of Service for Children Looked After and Care leavers will continue to provide feedback and support to the Service.
- 5.2 The Service has recognised that the roll out of Universal Credit may present many challenges and risks to our care leavers and additional resource has been agreed to ensure that all our care leavers have quick access to specialists in the area of welfare benefits, rights and advice as well as programmes of work on money management and budgeting. We have an ambition to relocate part of our Care Leavers Services to a community building which in addition to hosting key partners providing housing support services, highly relevant to many of our carer leavers also boasts some fantastic resources in which our Personal Advisors will be able to support care leavers with a range of independent living skills, provide a great space for care leavers to socialise and access support. It is anticipated that once established we will build on this model and concept to develop a 'one stop shop' approach and encourage a broader range of relevant partners and services to join us in co-delivery and colocation.

6 Consultation and Engagement

- 6.3 Throughout the development of our care leaver offer we have consulted with relevant stakeholders as required by the Children and Social Work Act. We have engaged with relevant groups including our Care Leaver Council, service providers across the council and partner agencies and the City's Corporate Parenting Board.

7 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 7.4 The proposals within this report are to meet our responsibilities to support care leavers achieve successful outcomes, and ensure that their rights entitlements and opportunities are promoted to avoid disadvantage.

8 Council policies and Best Council Plan

- 8.1 The proposals set out in the report are to support Children and Families Care leaving Services secure the best possible outcomes and specifically support the

Best Council Plan to:- tackle poverty and reduce inequalities; ensure that our care leavers are supported to access housing and reduce risks of homelessness; deliver on our principles as a Child Friendly City.

9 Resources and value for money

- 9.1 Providing effective and high quality support to care leavers, in addition to being both our moral and statutory responsibility, is also of clear economic benefit to Leeds. Supporting and enabling young people, with a predisposed vulnerability to achieve less positive outcomes than a comparison cohort of none care experienced adults, as evidenced in this report, increases the potential to reduce continual access to costly public services. By services and partners working together to establish a secure base and collective offer for care leavers it is anticipated that we will increase the number of our care experienced young adults achieve successful independence and outcomes.

10 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 10.1 None.

11 Risk Management

- 11.1 There are no risk management considerations identified with regards to the subject of this report.

12 Conclusions

- 12.1 As set out within the report above, the local authority holds moral, economic and statutory responsibilities for our children in care and those who become our care leavers. Our obligations define us as 'Corporate Parents' and as such we should ensure that all council departments and partnerships can make a contribution to improving outcomes for young people who have been in our care.
- 12.2 Given the significance of this work together with the importance for all our services, council wide to recognise our collective responsibility to do all we can to ensure the success of our care leavers and provide a visible whole council approach the City's Executive Board are asked to endorse this approach and encourage continued collaboration across the full council.

13 Recommendations

- 13.1 That the Executive Board:
- 13.2 Notes the strong track record of Leeds' support within our offer to care leavers and supports the direction and intentions to engage wider partners, services and stake holders in enhancing these services, including a whole Council commitment to improving outcomes for Care Leavers.

- 13.3 Confirms it supports our ambition to not only deliver the new national standards, but to go further to support our Care Leavers as long as they need that support.
- 13.4 Supports a Whole Council commitment for Care Leavers, with a clear and specific commitment from each Directorate setting out how they will work to promote better outcomes for care leavers and support the shared principle of collective responsibility when answering 'would this be good enough for my child'.
- 13.5 Approves the Care Leavers Offer, the details of which are set out in this report.
- 13.6 Notes the Head of Service for Children Looked After is responsible for implementing the recommendations of this report.

14 Background documents¹

- 14.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.

[References:](#) 1 Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds, Ministry of Justice (March 2012), 2 Care leavers' transition to adulthood, National Audit Office (July 2015), 3 Care leavers' transition to adulthood, Fifth Report of Session 2015–16, House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (October 2015)