



Report of Service Delivery Manager Care Leavers

Report to the Director of Children & Families

Date: February 2021

Subject: Care Leavers Service Restructure



Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Has consultation been carried out?	<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
Will the decision be open for call-in?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" 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

1. Main issues

- The Leeds Care Leavers Service supports all Care Leavers typically aged 18-25 but there are a small number of 16 /17 year olds and 26+ year olds. The service also support some young adults who were previously subject to an Special Guardianship Orders, experienced adoption breakdown or are former Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children but did not qualify for care leaver status, where these young people have no other support network and need help, support and guidance.
- The service currently consists of 4 teams, each team has a Team Manager and up to 9 PAs with an average of 7.5 fte equivalent per team. Caseloads per FTE are currently at 24 though this is set to increase over the next 12 months as a high number of children looked after become eligible for care leaver's services.
- There is currently one social worker in the service providing a 'transitions' worker role, taking responsibility for all cases of care leavers with complex disabilities (currently 17 people). This senior social worker represents the CLA and CL services and attends transitions and directions panel and is currently co-working 37 care leavers allocated in Adult services.
- The service have experienced an increase in caseloads over the last 5 years owing to a rise in teenagers entering care. In addition, there is a continued rise in caseloads

owing to a change in government policy; since the introduction of 'Extending Personal Adviser support to all care leavers to age 25 Statutory guidance for local authorities' in February 2018, all care leavers are entitled to receive a service up to age 25, whereas prior to this, statutory involvement typically ended at 21.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683701/Extending_Personal_Adviser_support_to_all_care_leavers_to_age_25.pdf

- The complexity of the issues care leavers present with are vast and require personal advisors to have a range of knowledge and experience, which is a continued workforce development challenge.
- Many care leavers reach 18 without a significant support network and many of the existing professional networks of support end at 18, as they are children's services (social worker, CAMHS, CSE/CCE support) and the PA then has to pick up these roles whilst supporting the care leaver to create new support networks.
- This report will highlight the risks and exposure in the service if the issues of staff shortages, lack of qualified staff and lack of partnership structures, go unaddressed.

2. Best Council Plan Implications (click [here](#) for the latest version of the Best Council Plan)

- Supporting care leavers to lead safe and fulfilling lives whilst achieving their potential, spans across the Best Council Plan. As Corporate Parents, it's our duty to ensure we support care leavers to live within safe and supportive communities in affordable housing, and have access to the right support to achieve the outcomes as described in the plan.
- If we get the support right at the earliest opportunity, there is a stronger chance of reducing the level of our involvement with care leavers at 21 and providing a broader support offer to care leavers up to 25.
- Care leavers who are fulfilling their potential will be better placed to contribute to society and contribute towards the outcomes of the Best Council Plan.

3. Resource Implications

- This report does not request additional funding, but requests that funding from the current budget, that has been frozen due to Council budget pressures, is released and used for recruitment. Consideration could also be given to reallocation of social workers from across Children's Services.
- The care leavers service currently has a vacant PO5 Advanced Practitioner vacancy that has been 'frozen'. It is requested that this vacancy is released for recruitment.
- The DfE provide additional funding to local authorities under the term 'New Burdens' funding, to support Care Leavers when legislation changed to widen the remit of support to age 25. For 20/21 Leeds was allocated an additional £115k to support Care Leavers over 21. It is proposed that this budget is confirmed to support the service build much needed management and PA capacity. This funding is provided on an annual basis.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- a. The vacant Advanced Practitioner post is recruited into.
- b. A Team Manager post is created using DfE New Burdens funding that is currently sat within the care leavers staffing budget.
- c. A Partnerships Coordinator is created using DfE New Burdens funding that is currently sat within the care leavers staffing budget.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To request that 20/21 new burdens funding is utilised to support the development of the Care Leavers service and mitigate current risks relating to understaffing. A fifth team manager post will be developed in order to spread current PA's across five teams rather than the current four teams.

2. Background information

- 2.1.1 The governments Care Leavers strategy from 2016 states that 'A good corporate parent should have the same aspirations for a child in care or care leaver as a good parent would have for their own child', and this means providing support and opportunities to reach those aspirations which, owing to adverse life experiences, can be much harder to achieve.

[Keep on caring: supporting young people from care to independence - GOV.UK](#)

- 2.2 The care leavers service was established in June 2018 to ensure that care leavers were given dedicated attention, support and service delivery. Prior to this care leavers services were embedded with older children in care teams. However, there are some exposures within the service that have only been realised over time, owing to the increasing numbers of care leavers and the complexity of the work. Details are as follows;
- 2.3 Personal Advisors are grade C3 and this is not a social work role. Some of the situations that care leavers require support with are complex and require a skilled response, these include; employment and skills, mental health support (include self-harm and suicide ideation), support with domestic violence and sexual exploitation, drug addiction and supporting care leavers who have children on child protection plans or in proceedings. We have seen a rise in admissions to hospital through mental health 'sections' and we have a number of 'high risk' care leavers who are at risk of serious harm from DV, drug addiction or exploitation. We have had 2 care leavers who have died by suicide in the last 12 months.
- 2.4 Many of the Personal Advisors are skilled and able to support care leavers with complex needs, but are finding that they have a large proportion of their care leavers who are experiencing one or more of the challenges discussed. This means they're constantly having to be reactive in their work and with very little opportunity for restorative support.
- 2.5 Whilst the service is skilled, there are still skills gaps through lack of experience or training. For instance, many PA's supporting a care leaver who is in proceedings with their child, don't have a good understanding of the Court process or how they can support the care leaver.

- 2.6 Some of the assessment work cannot be undertaken by a PA, for instance, legislation states that the first Pathway Plan must be undertaken by a social worker, and a social worker must complete a RAMP (Risk Assessment Management Plan) assessment for an adult who is at risk. These gaps cannot be filled from within the service and require additional social work resource.
- 2.7 Owing to rising caseloads, managers are struggling to effectively supervise the number of cases open in their teams; the figures range currently from 142 up to 186 per team. In the last Ofsted inspection, it was highlighted that supervision recording needed development and there was no evidence of pathway plans being discussed in supervision. This remains a concern but managers feel unable to go into the detail needed in the short amount of time available for discussion per case, an additional team manager will mitigate against these risks.

3. Main issues

3.1 High Case Loads

- 3.2 As discussed, the caseloads in the service are high. In 2016 there were 120 less care leavers open to the service and based on the number of 16/17 year olds open in the CLA teams, numbers are set to continue to rise and there is a steady increase in the number of care leavers continuing to require allocated PAs beyond 21. We need to start working smarter with those care leavers aged over 21 and this can be achieved through the development of the HUB and recommendations in this report.
- 3.3 As there has been ESIF funding granted for the increase of 2 PAs and a separate agreement for the recruitment of 1 additional PA and 1 PA to backfill maternity leave, at this time, we are not proposing to increase the number of PA's in the service. This will need to be reviewed in 2022 when the ESIF funding comes to an end. The two additional PA's started in November 2020 and the ESIF began in September 2020.
- 3.4 However, the team managers cannot continue to supervise a growing service with high numbers of staff and care leavers per team. It is therefore proposed that the New Burdens funding received from the DfE is used to recruit a new team manager to create a 5th team. The team will be made up from PA's moving out of the other teams. Each manager has too many PA's and cases to supervise so recruiting a 5th team manager will free up management capacity to do the simple things better, such as quality supervision. This should in turn have a positive impact on the PA's workload as they will be supported to work smarter.

3.5 Service Development

- 3.6 The Care Leavers service plan includes a number of areas of development within the service that are crucial to the effective and long term support of care leavers. These include, but are not limited to, the following:
- Improvement of pathway plan quality/usefulness
 - Improved support for care leavers who are parents
 - Improved response to care leavers at risk of sexual harm, domestic violence and exploitation
 - Improved response to care leavers with mental health problems including self-harm and suicidal thoughts
 - Development of the Care Leavers Hub and associated activities that will be hosted there

- Development of the Care Leaver Offer and the digital interface between the service and care leavers.
- Increasing the number of care leavers who are in education, employment and training
- Developing an improved transition between for care leavers moving from a social work team into the care leavers service
- Developing improved transitions to adult service
- Creating an improved partnership with housing colleagues to ensure care leavers receive at least an adequate standard of local authority housing and do not end up with rent arrears (currently 58% of care leavers in LA housing have rent arrears resulting in c£48k of debt).

3.7 The Care Leavers Service SDM is leading on all of the priority areas above, with some support from the Voice and Influence team, the Partnership Development Lead and the services Team Managers. The care leaver's service improvement plan is fundamental to our commitment to providing outstanding services for care leavers in Leeds. There is a real challenge for those services and managers supporting the improvement plan to dedicate and commit the required level of time to support this work.

3.8 It is therefore proposed that the vacant AP position that currently sits within the care leavers service staffing budget is released for recruitment. The AP would take a lead on practice areas including improved support for care leavers who are parents, those who are experiencing mental health problems or who are at risk and improving transitions. They will also take a lead on improving quality of pathway plans. The AP will not case hold but will co-work complex cases.

Partnership Development

3.9 It is proposed that the remainder of the DfE funding is used to recruit a Partnerships Coordinator at the same grade as Personal Advisors (C3).

3.10 The development of the Care Leavers Hub is a significant service priority for the improvement of service delivery. The aspiration is to develop stronger partnerships with the 3rd sector, health colleagues and corporate business. Whilst many of these relationships exist currently, there is little coordination of the services and as such they are not always targeting the support to care leavers in the right places. This has historically caused some conflict when the service has not been able to support the requests for referrals (e.g. for employment schemes) or been actively involved in events.

3.11 The PAs are regularly included in any development work, celebration events and group work etc. but have reached a point where they collectively no longer feel able to do this owing to the high caseloads and conflicting demands.

3.12 The service requires a coordinated approach to our partners with a single point of contact who has a good understand of the needs of the service through gap analysis and understanding the data, with the ability to manage relationships and support the 3rd sector with funding applications to support their endeavours with care leavers. This in turn will reduce the pressure on PAs and support them to focus on the complex areas of work.

3.13 When the Care Leavers Hub is open, the coordinator will also take responsibility for the activities within the hub and will act as a 'front of house' and the person welcoming care leavers on a day to day basis. They will take responsibility for organising groups

and events that will take place in the hub and sharing the information with care leavers.

3.14 As discussed earlier, the service plan includes the development of the digital interface between the service and care leavers. Currently, a website is in development where the care leaver offer will be displayed, along with a calendar of events and job opportunities. There is also a Facebook group with 25% of care leavers joined up to this. It is proposed that the coordinator will take responsibility for updating all of the media and developing new social media such as Instagram and Twitter.

3.15 Workforce Development

3.16 There are areas of the service that require improvement, including the quality of pathway plans and planning in general. As previously mentioned, in December 2018 Ofsted identified a priority area of improvement; *'Pathway planning to be better reflected in case records and pathway plans to be reviewed to ensure that they are meaningful documents for young people'*. The report makes reference to the issue of poor quality plans further in the document and also makes reference to the need to increase the number of care leavers in education.

3.17 Whilst a recent working group has been established to review pathway plan quality and to redesign the form, we have identified the services capacity to plan effectively as a continuing area for improvement.

3.18 When a child who is looked after is at risk, such as from Sexual Exploitation, there is a multi-agency planning tool to support the team around the child to effectively plan to support reduction of risk. When a care leaver reaches 18, those planning tools are no longer effective and there is no social worker to create or hold a support plan. Our current assessment is that the current pathway plans do not act as an effective tool to set out steps to reduce and oversee risk and present instead as a description of the care leavers current circumstance.

3.19 The SDM is creating a workforce development plan to support the training needs within the service, including effective planning. However, with caseloads as high as they currently are, PAs don't have the time to commit wholeheartedly to a full training programme.

3.20 The measures requested, including the addition of an AP and additional team manager, will support the implementation and reinforce the learning through support and supervision.

3.21 Proposed Budget Changes

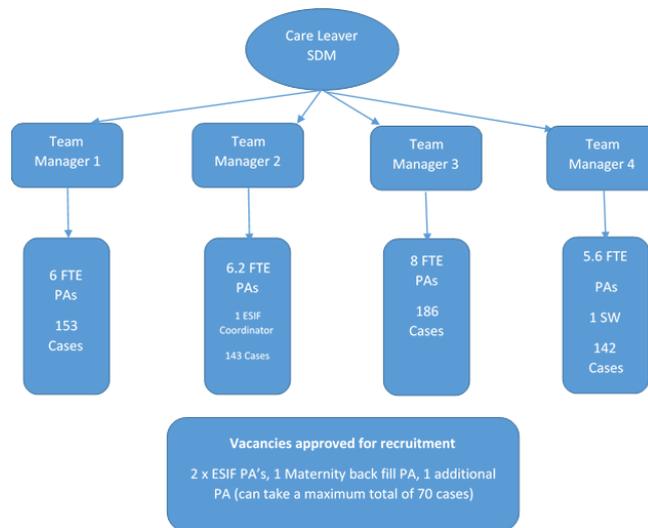
3.22 Current staffing structure and budget

Current Structure	
28.9 Personal Assistants	-£ 954,306.90
4 Team Managers	-£ 232,310.56
1 Social Worker	-£ 48,013.04
1 Advanced Practitioner	-£ 51,797.34
1 Care Officer	-£ 29,795.14
1 ESIF Coordinator	-£ 33,908.04
Total budget	-£ 1,350,131.02

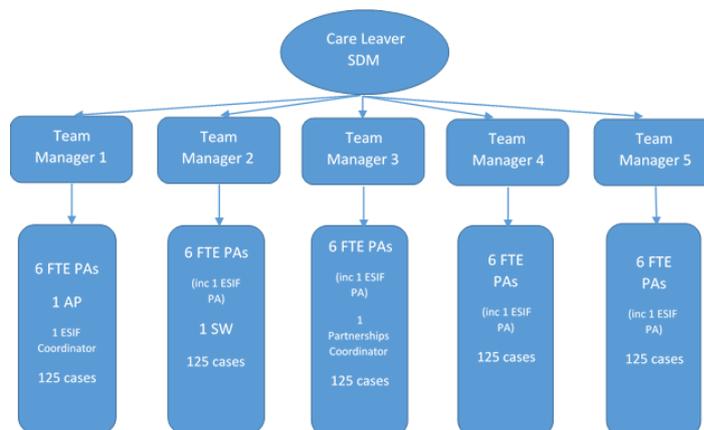
3.23 Proposed staffing structure and budget

Proposed Structure	
29.9 Personal Assistants	-£ 987,327.90
1 ESIF Coordinator	-£ 33,908.04
1 Partnerships Coordinator	-£ 33,021.00
4.8 Team Managers	-£ 278,772.67
1 Social Worker	-£ 48,013.04
1 Advanced Practitioner	-£ 51,797.34
1 Care Officer	-£ 29,795.14
Income	£ 115,000.00
Total budget	-£ 1,347,635.13

3.24 Image of current structure



3.25 Image of proposed structure



4. Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

4.1.1 N/A

4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

4.2.1 Recruitment to these social work positions will be in line with the council's recruitment process.

4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan

4.3.1 See section 2 for comments on Best Council Plan.

4.4 Resources, procurement and value for money

4.4.1 This DDR doesn't request any additional funds, but to use vacant positions and available funding from the new burdens funding of 115K.

4.4.2 Getting the support for care leavers right will have a positive impact on the spending for care leavers including reducing spend on placements, food parcels and cash support. In addition, if we increase support and improve planning at a younger age, we should find that many care leavers aged 21+ do not need a full service will benefit from dipping into opportunities from the 'hub'.

4.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

4.5.1 N/A

4.6 Risk management

4.6.1 No specific risks have been identified.

5. Conclusions

5.1 See section 3.

6. Recommendations

6.1 It is recommended that:

- d. The vacant Advanced Practitioner post is recruited into.
- e. A Team Manager post is created using DfE New Burdens funding that is currently sat within the care leavers staffing budget.
- f. A Partnerships Coordinator is created using DfE New Burdens funding that is currently sat within the care leavers staffing budget.

7. Background documents¹

7.1 No background documents

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.