



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

21st JANUARY 2020

CARE LEAVER OFFER

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY
SERVICES**

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to bring to the Committee's attention the activity of Leicestershire County Council's Care Leavers Team and the support provided to Care Leavers in Leicestershire.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The County Council operates its duties in line with statutory guidance including the Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers statutory guidance, The Care Leavers Act 2000 and Chapter 1, Clause 3, of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, which relates to extending Personal Adviser support to all care leavers to age 25.

Background

3. Leicestershire County Council has statutory duties to eligible young people (previously looked after children), called care leavers. It undertakes statutory responsibilities by providing advice and support in several ways for example, through the website, telephone contact, support groups and through Personal Advisors. A Personal Advisor is an allocated worker for a young person, up until the age of 25 years.
4. In 2016, as part of the OFSTED inspection of children's social care it was recommended, in respect of care leavers, that action was taken to improve the quality and management oversight of pathway planning and ensure consistency in the quality of advice and support provided by personal advisers to care leavers. This should include information about entitlements and provision of health histories. Work to address this formed part of the Continuous Improvement Plan - The Road to Excellence 2017-2020.

5. In January 2019, the Department for Education National Advisor for Care Leavers (Mark Riddell) was invited to visit the County Council. Mr Riddell met with the Lead Member, the Director of Children and Family Services, the Senior Management Team, members of staff from the Care Leavers Team and young people. Following the visit Mr Riddell reported that there was commitment to care leavers in Leicestershire from political leaders to front line practitioners and all were ambitious for children in care and care leavers. He made 17 recommendations to assist the service further in its improvement journey. The recommendations were:
- a) To consider the Champion Model Approach in which elected members champion a specific area for care leavers.
 - b) Membership of Corporate Parenting Board to be extended to include Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), probation and housing and for themed Boards to be considered.
 - c) The Local Authority to consider several ringfenced apprentice opportunities for care leavers.
 - d) Leaving care training should be mandatory for all staff from the front door to all social workers, foster carers and elected members.
 - e) The Housing Offer to be reviewed.
 - f) The local authority to set a target of between 70% to 80% for Education Employment and Training (EET).
 - g) Pathways to be developed so that care leavers and agencies are clear what their core offer to care leavers is.
 - h) Independent Reviewing Officers to consider reviewing Pathway Plans up to 25yrs using a RAG approach.
 - i) Care planning to start at an earlier age – at around 14yrs.
 - j) Paperwork and admin processes to be reviewed to support the work.
 - k) The Local Authority to consider whether it can introduce a one referral pathway – i.e. the Pathway Plan to reduce the number of referrals and duplication of information being passed to agencies.
 - l) A Council wide offer to be developed
 - m) The YOS/Probation Model where specialism is shared through transfer points to assist leaving care staff to have a greater understanding of the various specialisms to be considered.
 - n) Elected members to push for free transport for care leavers across the County.
 - o) The local authority to re-consider its university offer to care leavers.
 - p) For the LA/Corporate Parents to consider a place for care leavers to meet such as a drop-in /Hub.
 - q) The offer from 21yrs to 25yrs to be developed further by key partners/ agencies
6. Mr Riddell returned in November 2019 and following the visit he commented that 'Throughout the follow up visit I heard about the rapid progress you have made to your offer to care leavers since my two-day formal visit earlier this year... what I heard was a very strong offer to care leavers and from what I have seen I would rate services as in the top ten most improved local authorities.'

7. The November 2019 Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services graded services for children in care and care leavers to be Good.

Care Leaver Services in Leicestershire

8. The Council aims to be the best performing local authority in the country against well-defined ambitions and measures, and where it is not yet there targets for annual improvement will be set. For example, ensuring all young people have SMART plans which they understand and help write to ensure they are given all the support and advice they need to make positive life choices.
9. The Council aims to be open and inclusive. To this effect, Care Leavers play a key role in shaping the service and holding the authority to account for its actions. The County Council is ambitious for its children and young people and strives to ensure the outcomes it achieves are the best.
10. The Care Leavers Offer sets out the Council's and partners' commitment to care leavers, covering -
 - Benefits and income: There is now a protocol in place with the Department of Work and Pensions that recognises the specific needs of care leavers claiming benefits and helping them maximise their income.
 - Careers Advice: The careers advice service has been brought in-house. This has helped to increase the number of care leavers in education, employment and training.
 - Multi-agency risk panel: A multi-agency risk-management panel meets every 2 months to discuss the needs of the most vulnerable care leavers and put together plans to help them.
 - Higher Education: As at the beginning of October 2019, 8 young people started at University, 7 in their second year 3 in their 3rd year and 1 in the final year of Masters.
11. On their 18th and 21st Birthdays, care leavers are sent a letter from the Director of Children and Family Services enclosing a copy of 'The Offer' and setting out the services and support on offer. This is followed up with an annual letter until they reach 25.

Care Leavers Covenant

12. The Care Leavers Covenant has been developed in response to 'Keep on Caring', a major policy document (published in 2016) on support for young people from care to independence. A key policy commitment in the 'Keep on Caring' paper is a strategic pledge to introduce a Care Leaver Covenant. This is a promise made by the private, public and voluntary sectors to provide support for care leavers aged 16-25 to help them to live independently.

13. Organisations can offer opportunities and a new way of thinking to aid the care leavers in moving forward successfully to the next phase of their lives. Each organisation that commits to the Covenant will be able to offer a support package to care leavers that is tailored to its specific expertise.
14. The County Council is developing its links with local business and partners as part of the Care Leavers Covenant.

The Draft Care Leavers Protocol (housing)

15. The draft Care Leavers Housing Protocol sets out a formal agreement between the County Council, the seven District Councils, The Bridge (a housing support service) and partner agencies working with care leavers.
16. The Protocol establishes the aims, roles and responsibilities of signatory partners towards accommodation pathways for care leavers and sets out the support offered to care leavers, in particular in ensuring the most suitable accommodation is provided for this group of young people. Dialogue with Districts to finalise the protocol is ongoing and their intention is to complete and launch the Protocol in early 2020.
17. The purpose of the protocol is to ensure the effective discharge of corporate responsibilities between the County Council (Children and Family Services), Local Housing Authorities, The Bridge and other partners by jointly addressing the diverse accommodation needs of young people leaving care in Leicestershire and related equality issues to prevent such issues as homelessness.

Council Tax Exemption

18. All district councils in Leicestershire have now agreed that care leavers should be exempt from the payment of Council Tax until the age of 25. This arrangement was put in place in recognition of the particular difficulties faced by care leavers when living independently for the first time, often without the support of family or much financial education. This has been in place since 1 April 2019.
19. A joint protocol is being developed with the Job Centre and the DWP to ensure care leavers are supported more effectively, should they need to claim benefits.

Corporate Parenting

20. In December 2019, Cabinet approved a revised Corporate Parenting Strategy, following a period of consultation. The strategy outlined the local authority's duties, responsibilities and ambitions for Children in Care and Care Leavers. The role of the Lead Member and Elected Members is outlined in the strategy. In addition, a five-member panel has reviewed the role of Corporate Parenting and as an outcome the local authority has now established three Member Champions for Children in Care and Care Leavers. Each Member Champion has

one of the following lead areas; Health and Wellbeing, Housing and Accommodation and Education, Employment and Training

21. Member Champions are appointed to support the work of lead officers and partners by championing the area of interest for Children in Care and Care Leavers, to ensure that action is being taken to improve their outcomes and to address shortcomings in service provision in the relevant areas.
22. The Member Champions will also discuss the needs of CIC so that decisions about the offer reflects Care Leavers' journey and the importance of 'starting early' to make the most difference for our children and young people.

Voice

23. As well as the Children in Care Council there is a SYPAC (supporting young people after care). This is a group of care leavers that meets monthly to socialise and help the local authority and other agencies review the work they do with them and future plans and policies

Apprenticeships

24. On 30th May 2018, People Strategy Board agreed to support the proposal to ring-fence apprenticeship opportunities for Leicestershire County Council (LCC) care leavers. This decision was based on statistics showing that Leicestershire care leavers were over ten times more likely than their peers to be not in education, employment or training (NEET).
25. Other local authorities (statistical or regional neighbours) at that time provided a variety of opportunities for their own care leavers to be supported into employment within their own organisations, however prior to this scheme the County Council did not offer any discrete support to care leavers that enabled them to access LCC apprenticeships.
26. Statutory guidance evidenced that the ring-fencing of apprenticeships for care leavers was a legitimate way of supporting them into EET, and LCC People Strategy Board agreed to back the proposed scheme that had a target of filling six apprenticeship posts by April 2019.
27. We currently have 5 apprentices within the authority and over the next year will further develop the processes and support to those coming through the system as new apprentices in the County Council.

Outcomes

28. There are currently 283 care leavers aged between 18 and 25 in Leicestershire.
29. At the end of Quarter 2 2019/20, the number of pathway plans completed was 87.6% (198 of 226). The plans are identifying more clearly outcomes for the young people to enable them to move into independence with the skills they need.

30. At the end of Quarter 2, 90.4% (94 of 104). of Care Leavers were in suitable accommodation Young people are reflecting that they enjoy the support they get in their accommodation from their Personal Advisors which helps them to maintain their accommodation.
31. 97.1% (101 of 104) of Care Leavers were in contact with the Department at the end of Quarter 2. This ensures that young people are supported above and beyond what is needed for them to make transitions into independent living and it is known where young people need extra support.
32. At the end of Quarter 2, 60.6% (63 of 104) of care leavers were in Education Employment or training. Young people are saying they want to look at vocational courses as well as University for further study, which is positive.

Resource Implications

33. The Care Leaver team supports a range of care leaver needs. This includes provision of an allowance, setting up grant, support with education or training, transport, maintaining relationships with family, at times with accommodation and advice and guidance.
34. With the new duty for local authorities to provide support to the age of 25 came a government grant of £40K. This doesn't over the expectations placed upon local authorities but is likely to be the same amount next financial year.

Conclusion

35. The Children in Care Service's Care Leavers Team, supported by the Virtual School has achieved significant success in 2018-19, particularly in relation to outcomes for Care Leavers.
36. The new responsibilities place new duties on the Council to consider how these services are delivered and whether current provision is satisfactory.
37. During 2019 the Service made progress against all 17 recommendations made by the National Advisor for Care Leavers. However, further progress will be hampered without investment.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

38. None

Equality and Human Rights Implications

There are no equality or human rights implications arising from the report.

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