

Title of the Report: Local Offer for Care Leavers

Executive Summary:

The Children and Social Worker Act 2017 places a duty on the local authority to publish a Local Offer for Care Leavers providing information about services which the local authority offers that may assist Care Leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living. This includes services relating to health and wellbeing; relationships; education and training; employment; accommodation and participation in society.

The term “Care Leavers” is used to describe those children and young people who fall within scope of local authority duties set out in sections 23A and 24D of the Children Act 1989.

This reports sets out the current Local Offer and the developments to further strengthen that offer for Care Leavers in Walsall.

The Local Offer will be co-designed with young people about to leave care and those who have left care. It will need to be set out in a brief, jargon free and easy to read formats available in a range of mediums, including the Council’s website, social media, and in written formats that are accessible for young people.

Our Pledges will further support and monitor this local offer and ensure it is effective and ensure all care leavers get the right support at the right time.

Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board:

To set out the current Local Offer for care leavers across all agencies and identify further development of the Local Offer

Recommendations:

The Board is recommended to:

1. To consider the current draft Local Offer set out below and provide further challenge.
2. To endorse the actions set out below and identify any further areas of development

Background papers:

None

Corporate Parenting Pledges; Our pledge to Care Leaver are

We will improve the transition into adulthood so that all young people leaving care are better prepared and supported to live independently.
We will improve access to education, employment and training and help you with your career plans
We will help you to experience stability in your lives, and feel safe and secure, including help to find and keep a stable place to live
We will provide improved access to health support, and go to medical appointments with you if you are worried to go alone
We will help you learn about budgeting and what bills to pay to help achievement of financial stability
We will respect you as individuals, not judge you on the past, and we will believe in your future
We will listen to you, hear what you say and spend some time with you away from the office.

Resource and legal considerations:

A review of the service was undertaken in 2017 in response to the Government's Keep on Caring strategy. This led to an investment of £190,000 and increased the number of Personal Advisors from 6 full time equivalents to 10 full time equivalent personal advisers (PA). In addition the management capacity within the service was strengthened with the appointment of 2 Assistant Team Managers.

The review also sought the views of care leavers and as a result of this the Transition and Leaving Care Service was relocated in April 2017 to a venue that is more conducive to provision of services and creating a hub.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Children have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well
- People have increased independence, improved health and can positively contribute to their communities.
- Communities are prospering and resilient with all housing needs met in safe and healthy places that build a strong sense of belonging and cohesion

The services and the improvements play a key role in the quality of life and outcomes for the children, young people and families of Walsall The Council and its partners as Corporate Parents make critical contributions to improve outcomes.

Environmental impact:

None

Performance management:

There a range of performance measures and quality assurance audits are monitored and reviewed monthly by the Children's Performance Board, chaired by the Director of Children's Services.

Specific recommendations related to the provision of services for care leavers are progressed and monitored by the Ofsted Action Plan. Progress is monitored by the Children's Senior Management Team as well as the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee who monitor the quality and performance of the Council's services to children and their families;

Reducing inequalities:

The Local Offer response to the issues raised by care experienced young people continues to secure improvements in the equality of services, which, when achieved will have a positive impact on our most vulnerable children, young people and families

Consultation:


A consultation survey with children leaving care and care leavers in respect of the Local Offer commenced in August 2018 and its findings will be evaluated in September 2018.

The Council4Kids will frequently review offer, and ensure we as corporate parents are challenged when needed. Our feedback survey will be developed to ensure we continue to develop services in line with the local offer in measuring how well we are doing and what we need to do better

In addition there has been ongoing discussion and consultation with the staff and partners for the local offer has been undertaken with staff and partners through a variety of ways to gather thoughts and feedback, for example service meetings , meetings with colleagues in health and housing , Corporate Parenting Steering Group Board and previous meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board

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Report: The draft local offer for care leavers

1.0	<p>Introduction</p> <p>The aim of the Corporate Parenting Board is to ensure the corporate responsibility of the whole council and partner agencies to children looked after and care leavers, through the corporate parenting arrangements and governance. The Corporate Parenting Board holds others to account where the needs and wellbeing of children looked after and care leavers are not met.</p>
1.1	<p>The principle of <i>‘would this be good enough for my child’</i> underpins our Corporate Parenting Board and therefore the priorities of the Board for children looked after and care leaver are to ensure that the whole Council and partner agencies work together towards ensuring better outcomes for children looked after and care leavers</p>
1.2	<p>Relevant professionals from across different partner organisations support the priorities of the Corporate Parenting Board. This group, will monitor progress and support activity and regular updates on progress will be delivered to the Children’s Directorate Management Team and Council4Kids.</p>
1.3	<p>Services for Care leavers in Walsall were judged to be requiring improvement.by Ofsted in their inspection in June 2017. Our local offer seeks to improve services and deliver good outcomes for Care Leavers.</p>
2.0	<p>National Policy and Legal Framework: The Government’s strategy entitled Keep on Caring; Supporting Young People from Care to Independence was published in July 2016 set out a plan for the delivery of a ‘step change’ in services for children in and leaving care. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 enshrines that step change.</p>
2.1	<p>The Children and Social Work Act 2017 received Royal Assent on 27th April 2017. The Act aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve support for children looked after in England and Wales especially for those leaving care; • Enable better learning about effective approaches to child protection and care in England; • Establish a new regulatory body for the social work profession in England
2.2	<p>The Act introduces new duties in respect of Care Leavers and these are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To consult on and publish their local offer for care leavers which outlines the services that are available within the local authority area and to ensure that this provision is regularly reviewed in consultation with them

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have regard to the seven corporate parenting principles that guide the way in which local authority provide services for children looked after and Care Leavers. • To offer Personal Adviser support for every care leaver up to the age of 25, including care leavers who return to the local authority at any point between the ages of 21 and 25 years.
2.3	<p>The Government also introduced a seven corporate parenting principles that require all directorates within a local authority to recognise their role as Corporate Parents.</p> <p>The Act stipulates that the local authorities must have regard to these principles whenever they exercise a function in relation to looked after children and care leavers. The principles require Corporate Parents :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to act in the best interests of, and to promote the health and wellbeing of children and young people; • to encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings; • to take account of a child or young person's views, wishes and feelings; • to help children and young people to gain access to and get the best use of the services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners; • to promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for children and young people. • for children and young people to be safe and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; • to prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living
2.4	<p>Services within the Local Authority where the consideration of the corporate parenting principles should generally apply are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Social care • Libraries • Leisure and recreation • Council tax • Strategic policies and plans, such as, health and wellbeing plans, joint strategic needs assessments.

2.5	<p>While the duty to have regard to the principles only applies to local authorities, other agencies play an important role in supporting looked after children and care leavers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 places a duty to make arrangements to promote co-operation between relevant partners with a view to improving the well-being of children, including looked after children and care leavers. • Section 10 (5) of the 2004 Act also places a duty on relevant partners to cooperate with the local authorities in making these arrangements. Organisations and services include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Health Services ○ Housing providers ○ Schools, further and higher education providers ○ Employers ○ The Immigration Service ○ Police, prisons and youth offending services ○ Voluntary organisations
2.6	<p>Section 2 of the Children and Social Care Act 2017 requires local authorities to publish information about services offered to care leavers and other services that may assist care leavers to transition to adulthood and independent living.</p>
2.7	<p>Consultation</p> <p>A consultation survey with children leaving care and care leavers in respect of the Local Offer is currently in progress and its findings will be evaluated in September 2018.</p> <p>In addition, there has been ongoing discussions and consultation with the staff and partners for the local offer through a variety of ways to gather thoughts and feedback, for example staff service meetings, meetings with colleagues in health and housing, Corporate Parenting Steering Group and previous meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board.</p> <p>The Council4Kids will frequently review offer, and ensure we as corporate parents are challenged when needed. Our feedback survey will be developed to ensure we continue to develop services in line with the local offer in measuring how well we are doing and what we need to do better</p>
3.0	<p>The Draft Local Offer</p> <p>A published Local Offer, as well as supporting the ability of care leavers to find information and access services directly, will also enable Personal Advisers to maximise access to the right help to implement a young person's Pathway Plan.</p>
3.1	<p>Personal Advisors up to the age of 25; The Personal Adviser role is the key enabler in supporting young people leaving care to plan and prepare for the transition and to manage and sustain their independence after the age of 18. There is a commitment to ensuring the Personal Advisors work with no more</p>

	<p>than 25 young people at any one time. The increase in the number of personal advisors in 2017 has improved access to support from an earlier point in the leaving care journey. Staffing required to comply with the statutory duties will be met from within agreed resources for Children's Social Care in 2018/19.</p>
3.1.1	<p>The Transition and Leaving Care Service is committed to meeting its changing duties to allocate a Personal Adviser from the age of 16 and up to the age of 25 for those young people who wish to continue receiving support.</p> <p>The Service already offers this extended support to 22 young people who have turned 21 where there is a need or a request for ongoing support. Young people likely to require additional support may have special educational needs or a disability, or are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) whose immigration status is unclear, may be leaving custody or have been in contact with the criminal justice system or are young parents or going through a difficult time..</p>
3.1.2	<p>It is expected that the number of young people with an allocated Personal Adviser will rise in 2018/19, with 41 young people due to turn 21 in the year who may continue to require a personal advisor.</p> <p>At this point it cannot be predicted how many of young people will opt-out of continuing support from 21. Nor is it easy to predict how many young people who no longer receive a service will request further support as they now have an entitlement to return to the service between the ages of 21 and 25.</p> <p>Contact has been made with all young people who are no longer in receipt of services since 2017 to ensure that they are aware of their entitlements.</p>
3.2	<p>Improving Pathway Planning (Ofsted recommendation):</p> <p>Children looked after and care leaver's support is tailored to their individual needs, wishes and aspirations. The Pathway Plan is a statutory document that sets that offer out and is subject to review. The pathway plan evolves from the young person's care plan and as such it should consider the whole life journey of the young person, reflect their aspirations, the practical skills they have or need to develop and what steps the young person, other organisations and individuals will do support them.</p> <p>In autumn 2017, consultation with care leavers commenced on the development of their pathway plan. Young people have told us that the current pathway plan is too lengthy. It shares unnecessary information and is not personalised. A range of formats were shared and as a result of their feedback we have changed the format to make it more personalised, shorter and more focused. This new format has been piloted and reviewed with the young people. Further amendments were made and it is now being built into the electronic social care recording system Mosaic.</p> <p>The impact of the changes will be reviewed via audits and further consultation with the Council4Kids.</p>

	<p>Actions in progress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Embed the Catch 22"Get Ready for Adult Life" with foster carers, residential care workers, other care givers , social workers, personal advisors.
3.3	<p>Financial Support and Managing money successfully:</p> <p><i>Being prepared and having good life skills: When care leavers have discussed their experience of leaving care they have talk about two main issues: how prepared they felt they were for leaving care and whether they had a choice about leaving. Although some young people experience help in developing the practical skills needed for living independently such as budgeting and cooking, not all young people are provided with these opportunities.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Walsall Borough Council exempt care leavers from council tax since 2017 and this exemption extends to the age of 25. 2. The Care Leaving Service has a joint protocol with local JobCentre Plus (Department of Works and Pensions) to allow for two-way communication between named staff at the DWP and a named personal advisor to allow them to solve any administrative issues in respect of their benefits. Personal Advisors work with Young people to secure their agreement to be listed as designated persons to assist in care leaver's claim. 3. Care leavers aged 16 and 17, living in supported accommodation as well as those who are unable to claim for benefits will be offered a weekly allowance equivalent to state benefits and wherever possible this will be paid into their bank accounts. 4. Care leavers are provided with a setting home grant of up to £2000 as well as birthday and festival allowances up to the age of 21. 5. Care leavers are supported to meet the extra ordinary costs of travel to maintain contact with family or previous carers to promote their network of support and reduce isolation. 6. Care leavers are supported with meeting the financial cost of key documents such as a passport or driving licence. 7. Care leavers are supported with additional training, to cover travel costs, book and equipment costs for young people in apprenticeships and further education based on individual need. 8. Care leavers are supported with one to one budgeting advice either by their personal advisors or welfare rights advisors or as part of their support plan when placed in supported accommodation. Care leavers may be also sign posted to other services such as Jobcentreplus or Turn2US who online tools for debt management, which are regularly utilised by personal advisors to assist young people with their budgeting

	<p>skills, and debt management. https://www.turn2us.org.uk/Other-help/Debt or the Government's Money Advice Service.</p> <p>9. Care leavers in higher education at University or equivalent are offered a bursary of £2000 over the duration of their course, subject to attendance, housing costs over University holiday, moving accommodation costs, support to apply for other sources of funding and student loans.</p> <p>10. Care Leavers in further education are offered a small financial reward of £50 for demonstrated effort and on completion of training.</p>
3.4	<p>Safe place to live:</p> <p>We must provide care leavers with suitable accommodation to live taking into account their needs and wishes. Children's Service and Money, Home Job now have joint protocol setting out how will we work together to ensure that Care Leavers are adequately supported and there is clarity respective roles and responsibilities, in line with the statutory framework.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Care leavers have priority status for Housing in Walsall. 2. Walsall Council has a zero tolerance for bed and breakfast accommodation. 3. Money, Home and Job Directorate and Children's Services will work together to reduce the risk of young person becoming intentionally homeless 4. There is a range of housing accommodation and supported accommodation provision in the Borough and care leavers are offered some choice but this could be improved. 5. Care leavers in foster care are offered the opportunity to remain with their foster carers until the age of 21. 6. Care Leavers are supported by their Personal Advisors and Housing Officers to maintaining their tenancy, including paying rent, council tax and bills. <p>Actions in Progress</p> <p>➤ Review of supported accommodation provision in the Borough is underway with Money Home Job and Children's commissioning.</p>
3.5	<p>Health and Wellbeing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal advisors will ensure that care leavers are supported to register with their GP and Dentist and were appropriate attend hospital or doctors' appointments..

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Health Passports are offered to Care Leavers by the Looked After Children Nurse and this provides a young person with their health history. The Looked After children Nurse will offer to meet the young person in completing their health history 3. Personal advisors will support care leavers to access specialist services such as sexual health or substance misuse services. 4. The Beacon- substance misuse service offers a young people's drop in every Monday based in the Town Centre. 5. Personal advisors will support young people to access counselling services for example Walsall Talking Therapies (Walsall and Dudley Mental Health Trust) Open to anyone over the age of 17 who are registered with a Walsall GP. Young people can self-refer on line or free phone number. 6. Personal Advisor will provide help and support to Care Leavers who are young parents to ensure that they are able to access support and help. 7. Walsall Council also has a licence to enable young people to access an online counselling service. Kooth.com is an online counselling service that is a free, confidential, safe and anonymous way to ask for help. This is targeted for young people up to the age of 25, is available from 12 noon to 10 pm Monday to Friday and from 6 pm to 10 pm at weekends <p>Action in progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Young people have asked for regular drop in service to support access and this is currently being explore with the manager of the FLASH service. ➤ The Transition and Leaving Care Nurse will add further capacity and support for Care Leavers ➤ We need to provide Care Leavers with improved and quick access to services that continue to promote good emotional and mental wellbeing. ➤ Walsall CCG and the relevant health trusts are working towards outlining their contribution to the Local Offer for care leavers.
3.6	<p>Access to Leisure services:</p> <p>Walsall Council's Sport and Leisure Services and Children's Services have made arrangements for all Walsall looked after children and care leavers to have free access to all individual activities at the Council's four Leisure Centres. This allows free use of the new Oak Park and Bloxwich Active Living Centres, Walsall Gala Swimming and Fitness Centre and Darlaston Swimming Pool.</p> <p>Care leavers have access to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free swimming • Free use of gym

	<p>To aid access a pre-enrolled membership card can be collected from the TLC hub, or accessed through the personal advisor. If young people lose their card during the year, this can be replaced at any centre (as their membership is held on the administration system) for a small admin fee would apply</p>
3.7	<p>Education, Employment and Training</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A dedicated Impact worker is co-located with the Leaving Care Service 2. All 16 and 17 year olds will have a review of their education via a Personal Education Plan to ensure that there is a clear plan to ensure young people are in education, employment or training. 3. All young people at risk or not in education, employment or training are tracked by the Virtual Head and Team Manager of the leaving care service, 4. All young people not in education, employment or training will be encouraged to register with Impact. 5. Walsall Council offers access to apprenticeships and work experiences to care leavers. 6. Care leavers are supported with interview practice, applying for jobs and with creating their CV and personal statement. 7. Direct work with young people to ensure that they are ready for work and are successful in apprenticeships. 8. Personal advisors will support care leavers to promote opportunities via open days at colleges and universities. <p>Actions in progress;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Establishing a mentoring scheme for children in care and care leavers.
3.8	<p>Respect and influence</p> <p>We appointed the Children's Champion in May 2018 to drive the involvement and participation of children looked after and the Care Leavers</p> <p>There are a number of way in which children in care and Care Leavers are enabled to be involved and participate and ensure that they are listened to.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children looked after and care leavers have access to Walsall's Participation Groups operating at the Hub or at My Place. This is one of the ways in which children in care and care leavers can get involved in making changes to services, training of foster carers, social worker, personal advisors or being part of a range of activities.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Children in care also supported by their Independent Reviewing Officers to ensure that they are listened to and inform their care and pathway plans. 3. How to Complain: children in care and care leavers are kept informed about their right to complain 4. Children in care and care leavers are supported to access the Advocacy Service or contact the Coram Advocacy Service, both of which are independent of the council. 5. Care leavers can also be involved with national organisations campaigning for better services for care leavers and they run national consultation events, to hear your views. 6. Care leavers are involved in the appointment of staff, service reviews and development. <p>Actions in progress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To further strengthen, widen and develop involvement and participation looked after children and care leavers in the Council4Kids.
4.0	<p>Next Steps</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Progress the actions identified above 2. Review the offer in the light of the local offer survey and consult with partners and staff – September 2018 3. To ensure that the Local Offer is agreed with Senior leaders and Members – Autumn 4. To promote and publish the draft Local Offer in formats that are accessible and young people friendly – September 2018. 5. To review the Local Offer annually with care leavers, staff and partners.