

Title of the Report:

Review of the Local Offer for Care Leavers 2020-2022.

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.

Walsall's first Local Offer for Care Leavers was presented to the Corporate Parenting Board in September 2018 following the Children and Social Work Act 2017 (Section 2 of the Act) introducing a new obligation for local authorities to publish a local offer for care leavers to include their support and guidance to care leavers. The Local Offer was co-designed with young people about to leave care and those who have left care.

The Department of Education suggests that it would "expect the local offer to be reviewed every 2 to 3 years", although this is not prescriptive. The review of Walsall's Offer is now timely as we refresh our Pledge and Corporate Parenting Strategy. Our Pledges will further support, monitor the local offer, 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 update the Board on the review of the Local Offer.

Recommendations

The Corporate Parenting Board is requested to review and note the content of this report and support the proposal to review Walsall's Local Offer and offer challenge to the service area in their pursuit to achieve the best outcomes for Walsall's care leavers.

Background papers:

Report to Corporate Parenting Board September 2018.

Corporate Parenting Pledges:

Our pledge to care leavers 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

The Children and Social Work Act introduced a set of Corporate Parenting Principles for children in care and care leavers up to the age of 25 years. Walsall Council and our partners believe adherence to these principles is the key to ensuring we deliver good outcomes for our children and young people in care and care leavers. The seven Corporate Parenting principles that local authorities must have regard to are:

- Act in the best interests of, and to promote the health and wellbeing of children and young people;
- Encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- Take account of a child or young person's views, wishes and feelings;
- 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;
- Promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for children and young people;
- Children and young people to be safe and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;
- Prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

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.

Citizen impact

Looked after children and care leavers are citizens of Walsall and as Corporate Parents we have a duty to look after them as we would our own children and prepare them for adulthood so they can fulfil their potential and play a full and rewarding part in their communities.

Environmental impact

None

Performance management

Corporate Parenting Board ensures everyone works together to fulfil the corporate parenting role and to hold each other to account for making this happen. The Board acts as the visible organisational champion for looked after children and young people and care leavers, promoting their rights, entitlements and aspirations.

Reducing inequalities

The Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out the response 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. By being effective Corporate Parents for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, we collectively seek to redress the disadvantage that looked after children and care leavers face.

Consultation

A consultation process of this review will be agreed with children leaving care and care leavers with the involvement of the Children in Care Council and wider partners. In addition there will be discussion and consultation with the staff and partners and it is intended that the outcome of the review of the Local Offer and our Pledges will inform the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

Report: Review of the Local Offer

1.0 Introduction.

1.1 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced new duties in respect of Care Leavers and these are:

- 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.
- 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.

1.2 Services within the Local Authority where consideration of the corporate parenting principles should generally apply are:

- Education
- Social care
- Libraries
- Leisure and recreation
- Council tax
- Strategic policies and plans, such as, health and wellbeing plans, joint strategic needs assessments.

1.3 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.

- 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:
 - Health Services
 - Housing providers
 - Schools, further and higher education providers
 - Employers

- The Immigration Service
- Police, prisons and youth offending services
- Voluntary organisations.

1.4 The local offer should provide Information about all the services and support that is available to care leavers. It should cover both the statutory entitlements and any other discretionary support that a local authority chooses to provide. Government guidance states it should include six main areas:

- Health and well-being
- Relationships
- Education and training
- Employment
- Accommodation
- Participation in society

2.0 **The current Local Offer Includes the following:**

2.1 Walsall fulfils its statutory duties to care leavers:

1. Allocation of personal advisors to care leavers: all of our care leavers had an allocated personal advisor by the age of 17 years.
2. Young people can get in touch with the service before their 25th birthday and we will assess what help or assistance we may be able to give.
3. Pathway plans for young people are provided when statutorily required and the majority of them were reviewed on a six monthly basis.
4. All care leavers at university are provided with a higher education bursary of £2,000 paid in instalments over the duration of their course, (subject to attendance) and a weekly allowance is also paid.
5. All care leavers in higher education or in residential further education were provided either with accommodation or reasonable funding when they made their own arrangements during University holidays.
6. All care leavers are offered suitable accommodation. Young people who are in foster care are provided with the choice of 'staying put' with their foster carer or moving to supported accommodation where they were offered support to improve their independent life skills.
7. All care leavers were offered an assessment of need when required and they receive financial assistance towards expenses related to education,

employment and training. They are also supported to access other sources of funding such as college or university funds or from the Department of Work and Pensions.

8. 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.
9. Care leavers are supported to meet the extraordinary costs of travel to maintain contact with family or previous carers to promote their network of support and reduce isolation.
10. Care leavers are supported to open a bank account or access relevant money management courses.
11. Care leavers are supported to gain important identification documents, such as a passport, National Insurance number and/or provisional driving licence.
12. Financial support in exceptional emergencies.

2.2 Relationships:

- Help to maintain or regain contact with family and people special to the young person such as former foster carers, residential staff or social workers
- Where appropriate, continuing to support contact with the 'Independent Visitor'.

2.3 Housing accommodation: We must provide care leavers with suitable accommodation to live taking into account their needs and wishes.

1. All Care leavers receive council tax relief irrespective of whether they resided in Walsall or out of the Borough. The latter was approved by the Council in March 2020.
2. Care leavers have priority status for Housing in Walsall and secure "Gold" banding at 18.
3. Walsall Council has a zero tolerance for bed and breakfast accommodation.
4. Money, Home and Job Directorate and Children's Services will work together to reduce the risk of young person becoming intentionally homeless.
5. 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.
6. Care leavers in foster care are offered the opportunity to remain with their foster carers until the age of 21.

7. Care Leavers are supported by their Personal Advisors and Housing Officers to maintaining their tenancy, including paying rent, council tax and bills.
- 2.4 Children's Services and Money, Home Job have joint protocol agreed in 2018 and this sets out how 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.

Action in Progress:

The review of the joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers is currently underway. In order to inform this review the Directors of Customer and Children's Social Care have commissioned a joint audit to understand the experiences of young people leaving care.

- **This audit will inform the revision of the protocol and how our Local Offer could be further improved.**
- **The findings of the audit and the revision of the joint Housing Protocol will presented to the Corporate Parenting Board for their scrutiny and approval.**

2.5 **Health and Wellbeing:**

1. Personal advisors ensure that care leavers are supported to register with their GP and Dentist and were appropriate attend hospital or doctors' appointments.
2. Health Passports are offered to Care Leavers by Transition and Leaving Care Nurse who also provides a drop-in service at the TLC Hub. The 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. For example, Beacon substance misuse service offers a weekly drop-in for young people in the Town Centre.
4. Personal advisors support young people to access counselling services for example Walsall Talking Therapies (Walsall and Dudley Mental Health Trust) and this is 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.
5. Personal Advisors provide help and support to Care Leavers who are young parents to ensure that they are able to access support and help.
6. Walsall Council also has a licence to enable young people up to the age of 25 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.

7. Young people wanted a regular drop in service to support access and this is in place through the FLASH service.

Action in Progress:

1. **Review of the how health summaries and passports are received / used by young people.**

An audit will be undertaken in August 2020 jointly by the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children and Manager of the Transition and Leaving Care Team in respect of the Health summaries / passports completed between January and March 2020

2.6 Access to Leisure services:

Walsall Council's Sport and Leisure Services and Children's Services have made arrangements for children in care 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.

To aid easy 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), a small admin fee would apply.

2.7 Education, Employment and Training

1. A dedicated Impact worker is co-located with the Leaving Care Service who works with work with young people at risk of or not in education, employment or training.
2. All 16 and 17 year olds will have a review of their education via their 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 of or not in education, employment or training are tracked by the Virtual Head and Team Manager of the leaving care service,
4. Walsall Council has created 20 opportunities for care leavers since July 2017 and offers access to apprenticeships and work experiences to care leavers.
5. Care leavers are supported with interview practice, job applications, creating their CV and personal statements.
6. Personal advisors will support care leavers to promote employment and further or higher education opportunities via open days at colleges and universities.
7. A mentoring scheme is in place for children in care and care leavers

Action in progress

- **A joint review with the Council's Apprenticeship Coordinator to improve the preparation and support with young people to ensure that they are ready for work and are successful in apprenticeships.**

2.8 Participation in Society

The Children's Champion will work with children and young people to be involved and participate in range of activities.

- Encourage children and young people to be involved, in shaping services, in challenge discrimination or barriers you may face as a care leaver and make sure your voice is heard and you are listened to.
- Provide opportunities to come together - children looked after and care leavers have access to 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, recruitment of social workers, personal advisors.
- Ensure that children and young people are aware of their rights and 'How to Complain'.
- Help to access the Advocacy Service or contact the Coram Advocacy Service, both of which are independent of the council.
- Encourage involvement with national organisations campaigning for better outcomes and services for care leavers.
- To be involved in the appointment of staff and development of the services.
- The TLC Hub offers a weekly drop-in to meet with staff and other care leavers.
- Using social media as well as newsletters to keep in touch

Action in progress

- **The Care Leaver Covenant: promoting and developing knowledge about what other organisations are offering to care leavers and accessing what businesses, charities and Government departments are pledging their services, support and opportunities for care leavers. See www.mycovenant.org.uk**
- **An annual awards event to celebrate care leavers' achievements.**
- **Review and refresh the drop-in service to enable more young people to access this.**

3.0 Next Steps

- 3.1
- Progress the actions identified above.
 - In consultation with children and young people undertake a review of the Local Offer - October 2020,
 - Approval of the revised Local Offer by the Corporate Parenting Board - Autumn 2020
 - Publish our Local Offer in formats that are accessible and young people friendly.