

Local Offer to Care Leavers

**Executive Summary**

Walsall Council has corporate parenting responsibility towards children cared for and young people leaving care from ages 0 to 25 years. Those responsibilities include the necessity to ensure that children and young people are safeguarded from harm, have a safe place to live, enjoy education, training and employment with high aspirations for their futures, are healthy and are cared for in ways in which any good parent would for their own child.

Section 2 of the Children and Social Work 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. This will include financial support, housing, health, education and training. The Local Offer should ensure that all care leavers have a clear idea of what services are available to them, as well as helping to highlight any gaps in provision or support that the young person may need. It should cover 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

Walsall Council currently has corporate responsibilities for 691 children (December 2020) in our care and offer support, advice and guidance to a further 281 of care leavers up to the age of 25.

This report sets out the support that will be offered as part of Walsall's Local Offer to Care Leavers and follows on from the work that has also been undertaken in regards to the refresh of the Corporate Parenting Pledges which is documented in previous reports presented to the board in August and November of this year.

## **Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board**

This report will set out the current Local Offer for Walsall Care leavers and identify further development of the Local Offer in line with other work streams. These include the Housing Audit and Health report that are outlined within separate reports.

## **Recommendations**

To update the Board in regards to the current Local Offer and any work that remains outstanding.

To consider the current draft Local Offer set out as an appendix to this report and provide further challenge if necessary.

To endorse the actions set out within this report and identify any further areas of development that the Board may deem necessary.

## **Background papers:**

Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017-2020.

Corporate Parenting Pledge Reports dated August 2020 and November 2020.

## **Resource and legal considerations**

Corporate parenting responsibilities for Children in Care and Care leavers sit with the Local Authority and its partners and are enshrined in legislation. (Section 22 of the Children Act 1989 imposes a duty on local authorities to 'safeguard and promote the welfare of each child they look after').

In 2017 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.

In order to thrive, children and young people have certain key needs that good parents generally meet. The Corporate Parenting principles set out seven principles that Local Authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to children and young people in care, as follows:

- 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.

Shaped by these principles and our approach, our mission is to give our children in care and care leavers the best start in life through effective safeguarding, high quality health and wellbeing support, and support to aspire and achieve.

### **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.

- it acts as the visible organisational champion for looked after children and young people and care leavers, promoting their rights, entitlements and aspirations;
- the mobilisation and optimum use of resources available to get the best chance of success for children in care and to support care leavers to positively transition to adulthood and independence.

## **Reducing inequalities**


Our 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 and young people. 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. The Local Offer for our Care Leavers aims to ensure and secure improvements in the quality of the services provided, which enables them to transition into adult life as responsible and independent individuals within society.

## **Consultation**

Both the Local Offer and the refreshed Promises have been co-produced with the involvement of the Children in Care Council and wider partners in setting the priorities going forward.

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## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Following a series of consultations and workshops undertaken over the last 12 months, Walsall's 'Promises' to Care Leavers have been developed and endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Board on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2020. (see appendix 1). As part of this work and given the relevant overlap, a number of separate work streams and consultations have also been undertaken in order to update our Local Offer to Care Leavers.
- 1.2 This report aims to update the Corporate Parenting Board on what we currently offer to our Care Leavers and what additional support we may wish to consider in the future. As such, if there are any changes required, we can address what needs to happen, who needs to do this and by when? In order to assist us to do this, the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum has produced a Care Leaver Local Offer Toolkit which has been used by us here in Walsall to review the support we currently offer. By sharing best practice across areas, we are now able to map out both our statutory entitlements to care leavers along with the discretionary support that we currently provide and/or can consider offering to our Care Leavers here in Walsall.
- 1.3 As a result of the above, a number of work streams are being undertaken in order to ensure that the very best service is offered to those that are our corporate responsibility. The aim of this work is to outline our offer and what we as corporate parents would wish for our children and ensure that other agencies understand and uphold their responsibilities within it. Whilst this report will provide an overview of our current offer and what proposals are being made, this should be read in conjunction with the current Housing Audit and Health Passport Reports as the recommendations contained within those reports will feed into the final Local Offer.
- 1.4 Consultation with our young people has taken place in a number of key areas. This includes independence planning, housing, health passports and website design. Included in this report are a number of considerations that have not been included in the consultation with the young people and are additional proposals that will need to be considered as part of the Directorate Management Group process.

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 On the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2018, a report in respect of Walsall's Local Offer was presented to Corporate Parenting Board which outlined the support that was in place at that time. Since then, some additional discretionary support has been included as well as a strengthening of the statutory responsibilities and how we can best meet them. These will be outlined within the various sections within this report.
- 2.2 As part of the work around strengthening our offer to care leavers here in Walsall, we have consulted with other Local Authorities in order to determine what a 'good' Local Offer looks like. We have also engaged in workshops/consultations provided

by the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum, of which we are a member, which sets out examples across regions and offers support and guidance by keynote speakers such as Mark Riddell (National Implementation Advisor for Care Leavers and Anne Longfield (Children's Commissioner for England). Each Local Authority will prioritise different types of non-statutory support so every offer will be unique to their area. By mapping with other Local Authorities, we can start to understand what components are commonly included as well as benchmarking ourselves against others to determine how we can enhance our support here in Walsall.

- 2.3 A significant part of a local authority's support to any child over the age of 16 who is, or has been in care, is assessing their needs in order to determine what level of support they are likely to require. A detailed plan, called a Pathway Plan should be prepared as soon as possible after the assessment so that the transition years between 16 and 18 years of age are used to prepare our young people for independence. In Walsall personal advisers are allocated to each of our young people at the age of 17 years and act as a focal point to ensure a care leaver is provided with the correct level of support. They should participate in reviews of the pathway plan and co-ordinate the provision of services in order to ensure the young person is able to access those services. Section 3 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires local authorities to provide personal advisers to care leavers up until the age of 25, removing the distinction between care leavers in education and training and those who are not. This also means that all care leavers will be able to return for help from their local authority at any time up until they reach the age of 25.
- 2.4 A key consideration as part of this process is how we format the offer and make it accessible to those it serves. The content and opportunities contained within local offers are important but for young people to make the most of the services available, it needs to be accessible and easy to understand. As such, consultation with our care leavers has taken place in regards to website design and information dissemination to explore the best ways of ensuring that they are informed and understand the services available to them. In addition to this, exploration with external providers that provide social media applications have also been explored and will continue to be considered as part of this process.

### 3.0 **Our Current offer and Future Considerations**

- 3.1 Here in Walsall, we have a number of key services that fall in line with what is offered in most other Local Authorities as part of the statutory entitlement. In addition, we also have our own discretionary support that is offered to our care leavers living both within Walsall and out of borough. In order to measure what we currently offer and what we could/should consider, I have broken down the entitlements within each of the main six sections that the Government guidance states the local offer should cover, what we currently have in place and what future initiatives we may consider.

## 4.0 Health and Wellbeing

- 4.1 In Walsall we currently have a number of additional levels of support in place that ensure that our young people have access to services in regards to their health and wellbeing. For example, our Personal Advisors will often support and/or transport our young people to medical appointments as well as signpost them to relevant services locally when it comes to areas such as sexual health, healthy eating, mental health and peer support.
- 4.2 Prior to the Covid pandemic, the TLC Hub held weekly drop in sessions led by a designated Nurse Advisor for Care Leavers. This could be accessed by the young people themselves or the Personal Advisor could access advice and guidance in regards to any health issues related to our young people. This service will remain in place and will reconvene once the restrictions in relation to Covid have been lifted.
- 4.3 We also have access to FLASH consultations that again are drop in sessions based at the TLC hub. Previously, a review of the FLASH service had taken place and a current review of the CAMHS service is being undertaken. In regards to our offer to care leavers, we do need to strengthen our offer in regards to bridging the gap between CAMHS and adult mental health services and I will expand more on this later in the report as some areas have managed to do this well and have a clear and well defined offer from their local CCG.
- 4.4 In addition to the FLASH consultations, we have access to Kooth which is an online mental health and wellbeing community support hub. This offers free, safe and anonymous support to our children in care and care experienced young people via a digital platform. It is easy to use and many of our young people can access this to gain support from counsellors or be part of discussion forums with other young people.
- 4.5 With any looked after child, health assessments are completed periodically during their time in care. As such, a record of their health is collated and a 'health passport' is ultimately offered to every young person once they cease being looked after. This document should contain information in regards to their health history and where possible, any medical information surrounding their birth or familial illnesses. A separate health audit report is currently being completed in respect of the health passports and will outline separate findings and recommendations so will not be reiterated here. This will however feed into the overall final offer in regards to health and wellbeing for our young people here in Walsall.
- 4.6 In regards to sexual health services, some Personal Advisors have been trained in delivering specific sexual health training such as the C - Card scheme and Condom Training. This was devised by the Terrence Higgins Trust and is offered across NHS partnerships focussing on sexual health and wellbeing for young people aged 13 – 24. It offers advice and guidance in regards to contraception, pregnancy and

sexually transmitted diseases and continues to be a service that is routinely offered to our young people both in and out of care.

4.7 In regards to healthy eating, as part of their community champion project, ASDA supermarkets provide lifestyle champions that can offer drop in sessions for our care leavers in regards to diet and nutrition. As part of this they will also offer free fruit and vegetables to our young people that attend and recipe guides to assist them in making healthier food choices.

4.8 All of our care leavers have free access to council run leisure facilities up to the age of 25. This means that they can participate in swimming and specified leisure activities as a way of maintaining their health and wellbeing.

4.9 As part of our care leaver drop in sessions, Personal Advisors have previously offered support workshops in regards to a number of areas. This has included managing emotions and learning relaxation techniques, advice and support in regards to budgeting and paying their bills as well as cooking and healthy eating. Over the last few months, all group drop in sessions have been cancelled for the safety of the young people and our staff. However, once restrictions are lifted these sessions will again resume as part of our ongoing support to care leavers.

## 5.0 **Future considerations**

5.1 Whilst a number of our young people are in receipt of benefits and therefore receive free prescriptions, glasses and dental care, those that are in employment and on low income salaries may struggle to meet these costs. We currently offer discretionary payments based on an assessment of need to support our care leavers but some LA's have health plans whereby financial support (i.e up to £300) is offered to all care leavers to cover some of these costs.

5.2 In regards to leisure facilities, whilst this is offered to all of our young people in Walsall, we do not currently have anything in place for those that live out of the borough. Discussions have been held through the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum to look at whether all care leavers nationwide could access council owned facilities in all areas so that there is parity for all young people regardless of where they reside. In the interim, some Local Authorities offer their young people discounted leisure passes/memberships to private facilities for a time limited period, for example for 3 months.

5.3 For most Local Authorities, the transition to adulthood and access to mental health services remains a significant concern and one that is not easily overcome. In some areas, specialist clinicians such as psychologists, speech and language therapists and/or mental health co coordinators are located in or have been made available as part of the leaving care teams but this is very much the exception rather than the rule. The National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers' second report



published in November 2020 highlights the need to embed within the Local Offer access to timely emotional wellbeing and mental health support and that they receive services more efficiently. There needs to be a strategic lead that can confirm what the Clinical Commissioning Group's offer is to our care leavers and how this can be improved.

## **6.0 Relationships**

- 6.1 As with many other Local Authorities, one area of our local offer that needs more focus is in regards to supporting our care leavers with their relationships and ensuring that they have an understanding of their life story. Here in Walsall, our Personal Advisors offer support and advice to all of our young people in regards to keeping in contact with their family, previous carers or friends. In some circumstances we also offer financial support so that their travel to see such people is covered. This is important for our young people to feel connected to those that they deem important to them as it plays a significant role in understanding their identity and ensuring future lifelong links as they develop further into adulthood.
- 6.2 We also offer support to our young people that wish to access their records as many will need help to understand the information that is contained within it. The relationships between the Personal Advisors and the young people is key in ensuring that understanding their care journey is done so sensitively and with the opportunity to talk and explore their feelings that may arise from this.
- 6.3 We also have links to relevant advocacy services and will refer our young people if they choose to access this. This is mainly referred to for our children still in our care but there are advocacy services, such as Advocacy Matters that we can access for our young care leavers that may be struggling with their emotional and mental wellbeing.

## **7.0 Future plans/considerations**

- 7.1 Peer mentor support and how we can develop this is an area that we are looking to develop in collaboration with our CICC. The pandemic has been a significant factor in our plans to encourage our young people to come together and the impact of Covid has overall meant that nationally, care leavers have been left feeling more isolated and vulnerable than ever before. We have continued to engage with our young people virtually and have supported those that are struggling with digital poverty by providing laptops/dongles when needed.
- 7.2 As part of the website design that has now started to be developed, there may be scope for a digital blog that could be used by our care leavers to help them post questions and link in with other young people in regards to a range of issues. This can be difficult to moderate and so careful consideration needs to be given as to

how this is best managed in the interests of those that will access it. We continue to use WhatsApp as this has been a highly effective way of us keeping in contact with our care leavers and is a platform that our young people are familiar with.

- 7.3 As part of the mentoring scheme, we are looking to encourage some of our older care leavers to become involved in our lifelong champion scheme. This is where some of our young people that continue to stay in touch with us post 25 are part of a 'keeping in touch' register and can provide us with updates/news events that we can use within our CICC newsletters and other forms of communication. We are currently looking at ways in which we can facilitate this but will be aiming to have this and a peer mentoring scheme in place by end of March 2021.
- 7.4 In addition, we are also currently looking at how we can recruit care Leaver Ambassadors. These are young people aged between 18-25 that have been in care themselves to ensure that the voices of children and young people are heard and included in the decisions made that effect their lives.
- 7.5 A current area of focus is the support that we offer to our young parents. Previously we have offered parent and baby groups and signposted to other practical support but there is not a defined pathway for this when our young people go on to become parents themselves. A themed audit to strengthen this is currently being undertaken and may recommend some considerations as part of the wider local offer to care leavers. Some Local Authorities have embedded additional support within their offer, for example baby box's with essential supplies or a set amount provided towards larger essential items such as cots/prams. As with most LA's we will often consult with other agencies such as the Teenage Pregnancy Team as part of Walsall NHS to see what support/charities may be able to assist and will make discretionary payments to assist our young people based on individual need.

## 8.0 **Education and Training**

- 8.1 The Children Act 1989 (Higher Education Bursary) Regulations 2009 make provision for the payment of the bursary by a local authority in England to a former relevant child who is pursuing a course of higher education started on or after 1st September 2008 and prescribes that the bursary is £2000.

- 8.2 In addition this bursary of £2000 which is paid over the 3 year period for those young people wishing to attend university, we also provided an annual maintenance allowance of £3,000 paid on a weekly basis to support with day to day living costs. We also offer 20 weeks' vacation costs which depends on the area in which the young person resides and the level of housing benefit that they may need (for example, this may be higher for our young people attending university in London). We will also continue to offer discretionary payments to our students for any books/resources that they may need.

- 8.3 Young people in further education do not receive a bursary or an allowance. We do offer financial support subject to an assessment transport costs or for those that are completing vocational training courses such as catering classes, hairdressing or beauty to secure equipment or materials essential to their course.
- 8.4 In some situations we have provided tuition support for young people to retake their Maths and English exams if this is deemed to be essential for them to access to higher education and future training. These agreements are often funded jointly between ourselves and the Virtual School.
- 8.5 In order to celebrate the success of some of our young people and recognise their hard work, we offer a 'Demonstrated Effort' award of £50. This is often provided when particular effort is recognised in education and training and is a way for us as corporate parents to show our young people that we are proud of their achievements. A number of our young people continue to receive this when nominated by their Personal Advisor as having made a significant effort in attending education and training courses.

## 9.0 **Future plans/considerations**

- 9.1 Many Local Authorities have written in their local offer a set amount of financial support for graduation costs (usually 2 tickets, gown hire and photograph). Whilst we have and continue to offer discretionary support in some cases, we may wish to consider offering a nominal amount to all of our care leavers that graduate from university.
- 9.2 As part of our work with the Care Leavers Covenant, we have been consulting with Local Universities and Colleges to offer additional support to care leavers attending higher education provisions. The Covenant aims to employ regional Covenant Progression Coordinators based within education provisions so that care leavers receive access to support both during and post study. This initiative is very much in its infancy and as yet is only in the early consultation stages. However, interest has been high and meetings with Local Authorities across the region have now taken place so a move forward in regards to this programme is expected in the new year.

## 10 **Employment**

- 10.1 There are a number of national and local initiatives that can be accessed to support our young people to get into work. Here in Walsall, we have access to Black Country Impact which is made up of 5 delivery partners across the region in order to offer free training, help and advice to our care leavers in securing jobs and training opportunities. It is funded by the European Social Fund and Youth Improvement Initiative and can offer practical and financial assistance such as clothing for interviews, travel cards and childcare provision. This is part of the wider Walsall Works scheme that was established in 2012 to assist local people in finding

employment. As a lead partner, Walsall Council has up to £8million available to spend with an offer to extend programme activity until July 2023.

- 10.2 Through collaboratively working together across teams they are maximising the chances of success for our most vulnerable young people i.e. those with SEND, care leavers, young offenders, teenage parents, and those at risk of long term unemployment. The pandemic has seen a greater rise in the volume of young benefit claimants nationwide and many of our care leavers have been impacted upon by working in industries that have been significantly affected.
- 10.3 Department for Work and Pensions has now launched its 'Getting Britain Back Into Work' package. This is a number of schemes that are designed to build on the existing Jobcentre Plus Support that has been in place for some time and takes into consideration the increasing demands brought about by the Covid Pandemic. The main features of this are the Expanded Youth Offer and the Kickstart Scheme, both of which now offer additional support to our care leavers.
- 10.4 The Expanded Youth Offer provides intensive support offered to those 18-24 in receipt of Universal Credit. Further support will be available through Youth Hubs with specialist Youth Employment Coaches and can be accessed via referrals through to Black Country Impact.
- 10.5 The Kickstart Scheme was announced by the Chancellor in July 2020, as a way to reduce the huge influx of young benefit claimants who will be displaced due to lack of employment opportunity within businesses facing economic challenges. Kickstart provides funding to employers to create 6 month placements for 16 to 24 year olds who are in receipt of benefits. Walsall Council will act as a 'gateway' organisation and will administer the programme which aims to make available 150 local work placements. Each placement is a minimum of 25 hours per week and is paid at minimum wage. The Kickstart programme will have skills and training embedded through the work placement to ensure that young people are equipped to take up employment once the 6 month placement has ended.
- 10.6 As part of our offer to care leavers, we have access to dedicated impact key workers that will support our young people through their journey to employment and training. In order to monitor progress and track the needs of our young people, a NAG (NEET Action Group meeting is held every month to ensure that information is shared and that partners are continuing to support our young people in line with the offer. Referrals are tracked and opportunities are explored as part of this process to ensure that our young people are offered the best possible support. This has led to a number of our young people securing training and employment opportunities.
- 10.7 Our offer also includes access to Walsall's 'Endless Possibilities' Apprenticeship Programme. This targeted Programme for Care Leavers was specifically established to provide those Care Leavers who are interested in pursuing a career

within the local authority, the experience and qualifications needed to secure permanent employment in order to achieve adult independence and economic wellbeing.

- 10.8 The commitment was to ring-fence 17 Apprenticeships vacancies (around 10% of our overall apprenticeship target) for Care Leavers. It managed to exceed that initial target last year as 20 young people were initially recruited as service areas were able to apply for a wage subsidy through Walsall Works to offset a proportion of the salary costs for the young person. The care leaver is paid the national minimum rates of pay for age and not the apprentice rate per hour in order to support the young person's costs of living independently. The young person receives all the usual Walsall Council terms and conditions of employment including paid holidays, staff benefits including access to the Council's wider learning and development offer. Walsall Works Programme makes a contribution to the salary costs for the Care Leaver for the first year and this is calculated based on the age of the young person, typically between 40% - 50% of the annual salary costs.

#### 11.0 **Future considerations**

- 11.1 Unfortunately, over half of our care leavers left the apprenticeship programme without completing it and a further 3 left to take up employment elsewhere. As such, a review of the programme was undertaken by engaging with the young people involved and the line managers that supported them. Whilst some real positives had been identified, the main concern raised by stakeholders was that many of the young people were not fully prepared for the world of work and struggled with attendance. This has led to consideration of a pre apprenticeship programme that will aim to offer workshops/work experience opportunities for our young people as a way of better preparing them for their transition into the workforce. Consultations with the Head of the Virtual School has taken place and a plan to produce this new programme is agreed and should be finalised by end of March 2021.

#### 11 **Accommodation**

- 11.1 A separate Housing Report is currently being completed in respect of the current housing offer which will outline its findings and recommendations so will not be reiterated here. However, this report will outline some of the additional support that we do currently offer in regards to housing and accommodation.
- 11.2 One of the main changes that has been made since the last report has been our council tax exemption for care leavers living out of borough. Walsall is now one of a handful of Local Authorities that offer this exemption to all of their care leavers regardless of where they reside.

- 11.3 In regards to additional financial and practical support to our care leavers, we ensure that all of our young people leaving care do so with the use of suitcases and are supported with moving costs. We often provide discretionary payments to support with initial food supplies and starter packs for when they first move into independence. This is done so following an assessment of need and is on a case by case basis.
- 11.4 In relation to our young people at greatest risk of homelessness, we have a dedicated Support Worker based within our leaving care service. This post was created as part of the Governments Homeless Prevention Strategy and aims to work with our young people that are in need of intensive support to avoid eviction and potential homelessness. This part time post is currently grant funded until February 2022.
- 11.5 We also support our young people to apply for additional support with white goods and health and safety equipment that may not be provided as part of the housing offer. The current grant provided to each of our care leavers for setting up home is £2,000 and this amount has stayed the same for a number of years. Many other Local Authorities have started to review this and some have increased their offer to between £2,300 and £2,500 or in line with inflation.
- 11.6 A recent audit in regards to pathway plans has identified a number of key areas as part of the development of our work in preparing our young people for independence. As such, a programme of work to ensure that pathway plans evidence specific skills and preparation work with the young person detailing how, who and when this work will be undertaken as well as clarity about what is expected from the young people themselves. This will also involve a review into the use of the Catch-22 toolkit to ensure that worksheets are being used in order to build a portfolio of achievement for the young person prior to their move to independence.
- 12.0 Future plans/considerations**
- 12.1 Following consultation with other Local Authorities, a review of our current setting up home grant may now be required here in Walsall. This will need to be undertaken by auditing current care leavers entitled and those that will be eligible over the next 3 years to establish projected costs. This will be undertaken and a briefing report made available by end of February 2021 to Directorate Management Group.
- 12.3 Another consideration is supporting with the cost of a TV licence. Currently the young person is responsible for ensuring this is in place but many Local Authorities have outlined that the first year will be provided for them as part of their Local Offer. A projection of costs will need to be undertaken before this can be considered and so a briefing report in respect of this will also be made available by the end of February 2021 to the Directorate Management Group.

## 13 **Participation in Society**

- 13.1 Ensuring that our young people are ready and equipped to engage in society is important. As part of this, we provide all of our care leavers with their first adult passport so that they have a form of identity that they can use as and when required. If a passport is not needed then we will cover the cost of a drivers licence instead.
- 13.2 The role of the Personal Advisors includes offering support with money management including benefit applications, budgeting skills and help to open bank accounts. All of our young people leaving care have access to their Junior ISA account once they reach the age of 18 and as corporate parents, we provide all of our eligible care leavers with birthday and festive allowances as any good parent would do for their child.
- 13.3 Until recently, our care leavers have been able to access up to 6 driving lessons through the Rees Foundation but many found that they were unable to afford to continue to pay for this themselves once the initial six had been completed. Therefore, the current offer from Rees Foundation is being reviewed and a new offer of support will be considered in the Spring of 2021. This will not include the cost of either the practical or the theory test and so young people will continue to be expected to fund this themselves.
- 13.4 Over recent weeks, our young people have been consulted as part of the new website for care leavers. This will ensure that all of our young people will be able to access relevant information digitally and be signposted to relevant services/resources as and when required. Ensuring that our young people have access to information that will assist them when living independently is vital and so consideration is also being given to other digital platforms that may be used as a tool to support our care leavers. There is now a website development plan in place with a view to having a basic platform available within the next 12 weeks.
- 13.5 For some of our care leavers, specific levels of support may be required to assist them with participating in society. For example, our UASC will require support around immigration and asylum processes that can be difficult and frustrating to navigate. One of our discretionary offers of support to our UASC young people is to cover the cost of their life in the UK test as part of their asylum application. This is currently approximately £200 and is often too much for many of our young people to afford. In Walsall, we have a dedicated Family Support Worker as part of our leaving care team that offers bespoke packages of support to our UASC young people. This post is currently grant funded until December 2021.
- 13.6 We also offer additional support to our young people leaving custody and link in with key partners in probation in order to ensure that the right support is in place to ensure that they are reintegrated back into society.

## 14 **Future plans/considerations**

- 14.1 All of our young people both in and out of care are invited to be a part of the Children in Care Council. Whilst we do have a number of young people that continue to be a part of this, Walsall is currently working towards a new Participation and Engagement Strategy that will continue to promote co production in a number of key areas including the website design and the final local offer.
- 14.2 Given that some of our young people may need additional support post 18, a joint piece of work between Corporate Parenting and the IRO service is being conducted to consider which young people we might consider continuing to offer the oversight of an IRO post 18yrs. Whilst this is clearly not required for all young people, a set of criteria looking at those that may benefit from this is looking to be devised as part of our offer in regards to their transition to adulthood. This may apply to our young people that are involved in criminality, have mental health issues or have a learning disability. This is very much in its infancy and an initial working group meeting is being arranged for January 2021.

## 15 **Summary and Recommendations**

- 15.1 As outlined within this report, there has already been a vast amount of work undertaken in order to map out our offer to care leavers. Most Local Offers are developed incrementally over time and that has certainly been the case here in Walsall. Consulting with key agencies is a vital part of the process and the current reviews taking place in services such as Housing and Health will assist to ensure that the final offer is as robust as it can be. In addition, we need to ensure that it is easily accessible to those it serves and is periodically reviewed and updated.
- 15.2 A good local offer is written with the end user in mind and is in clear language focussing on the 'parent' rather than the 'corporate' element. It needs to offer our young people advice and encouragement as well as ensure that they have the correct information and up to date links in order to access the support that they seek.
- 15.3 Appendix 2 is a draft indication of what our local offer may look like. This is not the completed article as not all relevant information is yet embedded within it. As part of the consultation process, an important feature was the need to ensure that the offer was not a copy and paste of other corporate policies and that the time had been taken to ensure that it is not overly technical or full of legal language that may not mean anything to the young people themselves.
- 15.4 Some of the national feedback from the NLCBF suggested the following:
- Ensure the offer is written for care leavers and not directed at Ofsted or Commissioners.



- Ensure that the Local Offer is available in different formats (including digital as well as a booklet).
- Ensure that a process is in place for people to report errors (i.e if information of links become out of date).
- Nominate a named person responsible for keeping the offer up to date (i.e when services change, opportunities arise or new support is agreed).
- Do regular checks to ensure the Local Offer is easily found when searched for online.

Our Current Offer includes:

- Walsall Borough Council exempt care leavers from council tax up to the age of 25. This has now been extended to include all young people that live out of borough.
- The Care Leaving Service works in collaboration with DWP and has a representative offer drop in sessions for both PA's and the young people.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Care leavers are supported with meeting the financial cost of key documents such as a passport or driving licence.
- Care leavers are supported with additional training, to cover travel costs, books and equipment costs for young people in apprenticeships and further education based on individual assessment of need.
- Care leavers in higher education at University or equivalent are offered a bursary of £2000 over the duration of their course.
- Care Leavers in further education are offered a small financial reward of £50 for demonstrated effort and on completion of training.
- Care leavers have priority status for Housing in Walsall. Walsall Council has a zero tolerance for bed and breakfast accommodation.

- Money, Home and Job Directorate and Children's Services will work together to reduce the risk of young person becoming intentionally homeless
- Care leavers in foster care are offered the opportunity to remain with their foster carers until the age of 21 under staying put arrangements.
- Care Leavers are supported by their Personal Advisors and Housing Officers to maintaining their tenancy, including paying rent, council tax and bills.
  - Personal advisors will ensure that care leavers are supported to register with their GP and Dentist and when necessary, will attend appointments to support them.
- 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. These are currently being reviewed and consultations with the young people in regards to this have taken place and will be considered as part of the final design.
- Personal advisors continue to support care leavers to access specialist services such as sexual health or substance misuse services. The Beacon substance misuse service offers a young people's drop in that can be accessed by our young people.
- Personal advisors will support young people to access counselling services for example Walsall Talking Therapies (Walsall and Dudley Mental Health Trust) and the Family Action Listening Works helpline. 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.
- 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.
- Walsall looked after children and care leavers have free access to swimming and gymn facilities 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.
- A dedicated Impact worker is co-located with the Leaving Care Service and reports all progress as part of the NEET action group which includes the TLC Manager and Head of the Virtual School.
- Walsall Council offers access to apprenticeships and work experiences to care leavers.

- Care leavers are supported with interview practice, applying for jobs and with creating their CV and personal statement.
- Personal advisors will support care leavers to promote opportunities via open days at colleges and universities.
- Care leavers have access to Walsall's Participation Groups operating at the TLC Hub.
- Our care leavers are also involved with national and regional organisations campaigning for better services for care leavers. This is managed and promoted through our children's champion and forms part of the activities through the children in care council.

15.5 The work towards a final offer is now well under way but a number of work streams need to be completed in order to be able to finalise it. These include the agreed housing offer and health passports. In addition, there are a number of potential considerations that have been outlined within this report that may need to be embedded within the final version. These are listed below and where applicable, timescales for completion.

- Housing Offer to outlined and embedded in the Joint Housing Protocol. (timescales for this are outlined within the housing report)
- Our health offer to young people in regards to their emotional wellbeing needs to be strengthened and a potential pathway between CAMHS and adult mental health services needs to be developed in order to ensure that those that need a service are able to access it. This is a key element of our offer and discussion with our CCG need to take place in order to start mapping this process. In order to clearly identify our offer to care leavers, clear commissioned services need to be embedded within the Local Offer so that our young people are able to access mental health services more efficiently.
- We currently offer discretionary payments based on an assessment of need to support our care leavers on low incomes with health requirements such as glasses, dental work and prescriptions. Some Local Authorities have embedded a nominal amount within their offer rather than keeping this discretionary. This may be what we wish to consider here in Walsall or continue with our support on a case by case basis.
- Lifelong champion and peer mentoring scheme to be implemented by end of March 2021. This will be a work stream from the Participation and Engagement Strategy and will be led by our Children's Champion.

- Care Ambassadors to be recruited by end of March 2021.
- Financial assistance for graduation costs to be considered as part of the final offer to university students.
- Covenant Progression Officers to be in place in Higher Education Facilities. This is currently being considered regionally in consultation with our partners in education. There is no current timescales outlined for completion and remains in the consultation phase.
- Pre apprenticeship programme to be designed and agree by end of March 2021.
- Costs in regards to the increase of the Setting up Home Grant to be projected and a briefing report to be completed by end of February 2021. This will then be presented to Directorate Management Group.
- Costs in regards to the offer of the first years TV licence needs to be projected and a briefing report completed by end of February 2021. This will then need to be presented to the Directorate Management Group.
- Consideration to be given to post 18 IRO support.
- Website design plan is now in place and suggested timescales for completion is end of March 2021.

Current timescales suggest that most of this work should be completed by the end of March 2021 and as such I recommend that a final offer can be presented to Corporate Parenting Board for agreement in April 2021. In the meantime, further consultation with our care leavers will be undertaken with further workshops planned in the year as part of our co production with both the Local Offer and future website design.

Zoe Morgan – Group Manager, Corporate Parenting  
December 2020

