



**Walsall Council**

## **Corporate Parenting Board**

Meeting to be held on: **11<sup>th</sup> January, 2021 AT 6.00 PM**

Meeting to be held via: **Microsoft Teams**

Public access to meeting via: <https://youtu.be/vCUVslAx8WI>

### **MEMBERSHIP:**

Chair: Councillor Wilson  
Vice Chair: Councillor Jukes  
Councillor Ferguson  
Councillor Jeavons  
Councillor M. Nazir  
Councillor **Neville**  
Councillor Statham

### **ADVISOR**

Alison Jones (NHS Walsall CCG)

**Note:** Walsall Council encourages the public to exercise their right to attend meetings of Council, Cabinet and Committees. Agendas and reports are available for inspection from the Council's Democratic Services Team at the Council House, Walsall (Telephone 01922 654369) or on our website [www.walsall.gov.uk](http://www.walsall.gov.uk).

## ITEMS FOR BUSINESS

1.	<b>Introductions and Apologies</b>	
2.	<b>Substitutions</b> (if any)	
3.	<b>Minutes</b> To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 2 <sup>nd</sup> November 2020	<u>Enclosed</u>
4.	<b>Young People Engagement</b> To inform the Corporate Parenting Board about enrichment activities provide for Children in Care and Care Leavers since November 2020.	<u>Enclosed</u>
5.	<b>Summary of Audit of Health Passports</b> A summary narrative of the offer of Health Passports to young people leaving care and identify views of young people following a small-scale audit of Health Passports.	<u>Enclosed</u>
6.	<b>Local Offer to Care Leavers</b> Information on 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.	<u>Enclosed</u>
7.	<b>Housing and accommodation needs for Care Leavers</b> To inform the Board of the key findings of the joint audit and how this may revise the Local Offer for care leavers.	<u>Enclosed</u>
8.	<b>Work Programme</b> To consider the work programme of the Corporate Parenting Board.	<u>Enclosed</u>
9.	<b>Date of Next Meeting</b> To note that the date of the next meeting will be 15 <sup>th</sup> February 2021 (special meeting).	

**The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012**  
**Specified pecuniary interests**

The pecuniary interests which are specified for the purposes of Chapter 7 of Part 1 of the Localism Act 2011 are the interests specified in the second column of the following:

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Prescribed description</b>
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
Sponsorship	Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the relevant authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by a member in carrying out duties as a member, or towards the election expenses of a member.  This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Regulations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
Contracts	Any contract which is made between the relevant person (or a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest) and the relevant authority:  (a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and  (b) which has not been fully discharged.
Land	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the relevant authority.
Licences	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the relevant authority for a month or longer.
Corporate tenancies	Any tenancy where (to a member's knowledge):  (a) the landlord is the relevant authority;  (b) the tenant is a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest.
Securities	Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where:  (a) that body (to a member's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the relevant authority; and  (b) either:  (i) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or  (ii) if the share capital of that body is more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.

## **Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)**

### **Access to information: Exempt information**

#### **Part 1**

#### **Descriptions of exempt information: England**

1. Information relating to any individual.
2. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
4. Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.
5. Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.
6. Information which reveals that the authority proposes:
  - (a) to give any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or
  - (b) to make an order or direction under any enactment.
7. Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.
8. Information being disclosed during a meeting of a Scrutiny and Performance Panel when considering flood risk management functions which:
  - (a) Constitutes a trades secret;
  - (b) Its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the risk management authority);
  - (c) It was obtained by a risk management authority from any other person and its disclosure to the public by the risk management authority would constitute a breach of confidence actionable by that other person.

## **Corporate Parenting Board**

**Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2020 at 6.00 p.m.**

### **Virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams**

*Held in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020; and conducted according to the Councils Standing Orders for Remote Meetings and those set out in the Council's Constitution.*

### **Committee Members Present:**

Councillor. T. Jukes (Chair)  
Councillor. K. Ferguson  
Councillor M. Statham  
Councillor F. Mazhar

### **Officers Present**

Colleen Male	Director, Children's Social Work
Elise Hopkins	Interim Director of Customer Engagement
Jivan Sembi	Head of Service (Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services)
Zoe Morgan	Group Manager Corporate Parenting
Michelle Cummings	Children and Young Persons Champion
Zoe Morgan	Group Manager (Corporate Parenting)

### **Welcome**

At this point in the meeting, the Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone, and explaining the rules of procedure and legal context in which the meeting was being held. He also directed members of the public viewing the meeting to the papers, which could be found on the Council's Committee Management Information system (CMIS) webpage. Members confirmed that they could both see and hear the proceedings.

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### **Introductions and Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor T. Wilson, Councillor L. Jeavons, Councillor M. Nazir, and Alison Jones.

Councillor F. Mazhar substituted on behalf of Councillor L. Jeavons.

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## **Minutes**

A copy of the minutes of the meetings held on the following dates were submitted:

- 7th January 2020
- 17th February 2020
- 10th August 2020

(see annexed)

## **Resolved**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> January, 2020, 17<sup>th</sup> February, 2020, and 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2020, copies having previously been circulated to each Member of the Board, be approved and signed by the chairman as a correct record.

128/20

## **Young People Engagement**

A report was submitted (see annexed). The Children and Young Persons Champion presented the report and highlighted the salient points.

Members were informed that WhatsApp had been used to engage the 16 years plus age group; this had been an effective tool in the engagement of young people. Microsoft Teams had also been utilised successfully.

The number of young people participating in the 'Children in Care Council' had increased. Technology had assisted in this, as young people could participate whilst in their own homes. In response to a question from a Member, Officers confirmed that this increase had been significant. A Children's champion engagement and participation group had been established.

Members acknowledged that it could be difficult to participate in virtual meetings, and asked how increased engagement of young people was sustained post Covid-19. The Children and Young Persons Champion stated that young people needed to be incentivised, listening to what they have to say, and the use of technology needed to be continued.

A Member questioned what was being done to future proof technology used. It was acknowledged that the pandemic had accelerated the use of this technology. It was also noted that a messaging platform and app was needed for younger children.

Young People had been contacted as part of a housing review, and their views had been sought to understand the support that young people had received in relation to housing.

A Member asked for clarification on 'MEL' research. The Board were informed that this was a group of representative young people who were asked questions and given tasks to provide an understanding of what life was like for young people in Walsall.

The Group Manager stated that the Authority was considering the support that could be put in place within colleges and universities for care leavers as part of the care leaver's covenant.

**Resolved** (by assent)

That the report be noted

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### **Final Local Offer**

The Group Manager spoke to the item. The 'Local Offer' was something that all authorities needed to have in place as part of the Children's and Social Work Act 2017. Walsall do have a Local Offer which is in the process of being updated. The Board were informed that there were many work streams that would feed into the 'Final Local Offer'. Council tax exemption was an example of this offer; this was available within and outside of the borough.

The 'Local Offer' would be ready to launch in the New Year.

**Resolved** (by assent)

That the verbal update be noted.

130/20

### **Corporate Parenting Final Pledges**

The Group Manager spoke to the report to highlight the salient points (see annexed). The report set out the final plans for Walsall's Corporate Parenting Pledges, which informed Walsall Corporate Parenting Strategy. After consultation with young people, the word pledge had been replaced with the word 'promise'. Four main themes had formed the basis of the promise, and these were then broken down into different age ranges.

The Board were informed that a series of consultations had taken place both internally and externally. This had included workshops which had included around 32 young people of varying ages, surveys, and an event for practitioners.

It was clarified that the Board would approve the pledges; Members were assured that the content of the pledges reflected the feedback from children, and a commitment to young people from partner agencies. It was also noted that these pledges needed monitoring for outcomes and impact.

**Resolved**

That the report be noted.

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### **Quarter 2 Performance Report**

The Head of Service spoke to the report and highlighted the salient points (see annexed).

The number of children in care had started to reduce; this was largely due to proceedings concluding. There had been a significant improvement in the timelessness of health assessments; this was expected to continue improving.

There had been a significant drop in the number of care leavers in education or training; this was as a result of the pandemic. Officers were working with partners and the virtual school to develop strategies for young people to gain employment or education opportunities.

In response to questions from Members, the Board were advised that there had been an initial backlog in court proceedings and court availability. Members asked if there was confidence that resources/capacity would be available to case manage an influx of case management when court proceedings were concluded. The Director for Children's Social Work stated that once court proceedings had concluded the numbers of children in care would likely to be reduced, with a number of children expected to progress into permanence outside of the care of the local authority. Therefore, there would be no capacity issues for service. Work was ongoing with the courts and cases were being prioritised.

**Resolved** (Unanimously by assent)

That the report be noted.

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### **Work Programme**

The work programme was considered by the Board.

Officers were asked to provide feedback to the Board on issues that were raised as part of the Shadow Board. It was agreed that feedback would be provided to the Chair. It was suggested that a report on the number of young people in care that are NEET, to provide assurance to the Board.

**Resolved**

That the work programme be noted.



**Termination of Meeting**

The meeting terminated at 7.00 p.m.

The date of the next meeting would be Monday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

## **Young People Engagement.**

### **Executive Summary:**

The Council4Kids, the “Children in Care Council”, is the forum where Walsall’s looked after children, young people and care leavers are able to shape and influence the parenting and support that they receive. Since the last Corporate Parenting Board on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2020 young people continued to meet virtually due to Corvid 19.

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

To inform the Corporate Parenting Board about enrichment activities provide for Children in Care and Care Leavers since November 2020.

### ***Recommendations:***

- 1. The Board notes the activity and events of the Children in Care Council***

### **Background papers:**

None

### **Corporate Parenting Pledges**

The Council’s Promise to Looked After Children have been refreshed by listening to what our young people and these are attached in Appendix 1.

### **Resource and legal considerations:**

The Children in Care Council is supported by the Children’s Champion and Participation Apprentice.

### **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.

### **Citizen impact:**

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:**

The Children's Champion works with children looked after and care experienced young people to ensure that the Council4Kids Influencers is rich and engaging forum. Regular reports are provided to the Director of Children's Services and the Corporate Parenting Board.

**Reducing inequalities:**


The children in care council seeks 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:**

The children in care council is one of the key forums through which services for children in care and care leavers seek to consult on service delivery and where children and young people are able to shape and influence the parenting they receive at every level.

**Contact Officer:**

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# Report: Young People's Engagement and Children in Care Council

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Care experienced Children and Young People have a chance to meet through Walsall's Council4kids Influencers forum where they **"Have a SAY"** about the things that really matter in their lives. Children and young people are able to have influence and shape the services and policies which impact on the parenting and support that they receive at every level. The forum enables young people to build friendships peer networks whilst learning new skills. Walsall Children in Care Council Influencers has met virtually since March 2020 due to Covid -19. The plans for the future are for the Influencers to meet face to face.

## 1.2 Digital Technology:

Children and young people have continued to adapt to having their meetings virtually. The continued use of Teams and Zoom in the new way of working is proving to be successful, enabling children and young people to connect with their peers near and far to build positive connections. We continue to use WhatsApp's to create different groups for young people to share information effectively speedy responses and fun activities. However we are looking forward to face to face meetings when we are able to do so in line with Government Guidance.

## 1.3 Key updates since Nov 2020

1. The young people's advisory panel met in October. They shared their views and have the expertise and skills to inform how we can further innovate and improve engagement and participation of children and young people. Their findings will be shared with the working group to develop and implement the Participation Strategy Plan. The young people said they enjoyed the experience and for the expertise, knowledge and time were rewarded with vouchers.
2. As we continue to increase the participation and engagement of young people we are developing the Children in Care Council mini influencers who are aged between 9 to 12 years. The mini influencers will mirror the Influencers group whereby they have a chair and in their meetings discuss important things that matter to them. Weekly meetings are now being undertaken for both groups of Influencers to keep up the momentum and enthusiasm of the groups whilst we operate virtually and there are restrictions on activities. The younger influencers are busy composing a letter to give to other young people when they come into care.
3. Young people will meet with the Corporate Parenting Board in the New Year. This opportunity is welcomed by the young people as they are getting to know their Corporate Parents and can discuss issues that matter to them in an open arena to improve services they access. We have been preparing for meeting in January 2021.
4. Our young people continue to influence change and have been busy contributing their views as part of the Health Passports review to explore how meaningful it is. Young people between the ages of 17-22 years were spoken to individually. Each young person was very open and shared their understanding of the health passport.

In addition colleagues from Heath were invited to the young people's meeting to discuss young people's health journey and how this could be improved and make the experience more meaningful. The young people engaged and shared their journey. Some of the ideas they explored was developing young people's health champions. The health champions would be young people who would meet with health professionals monthly to look at health issues raised by young people to look at how they can support young people in a holistic and effective way.

5. A review around the support for young parents is underway to ensure they are getting a service conducive to their needs. Each young mom was consulted through a lengthy discussion around the service they received during and after pregnancy to improve service delivery on our offer to our young parents.
6. Young people continue to be involved in improving the services they access and have now shared their experience of the support they received around housing to look at what we can do better in shaping the future of the service. The report will be shared at the Corporate Parenting Board.
7. It is important that our young people continue to be involved in the recruitment process of staff and foster carers coming to Walsall. In their meetings this is a regular topic of discussion. It is a firm favourite of our young people as they discuss the positive impact of being involved therefore would like to continue to influence decision making.

Young people have therefore put together a proposal to send out to The Fostering Service and Head of Service around the importance of young people's involvement through the young people's panel. The proposal highlights what young people can bring when they are involved in the process the benefits to the organisation. ( See Appendix 2 )

8. The dedicated Transition and Leaving Care Service are busy preparing the yearly festive hampers for our Care Leavers. The festive period can be even more isolating and a lonely time for many of our young people especially during this lockdown period. As it is not possible for the annual celebratory festive meal provided by the service. The Leaving Care service are doing their best ensuring our care leavers hampers are bigger and are aware of services within the community that provide a Christmas meal. It is really disappointing that we will not be able to have our annual Christmas Meal due to the Government's restrictions.

#### **1.4 Our Meetings:**

Our meetings now weekly whilst we remain in Tier 3 and comply with the Government's guidance. Young people recognise the difficulties of not connecting with their peers can have on their mental wellbeing so the weekly meetings enables our young people to build new peer connections have a weekly focus whilst there are restrictions on activities.

1. During the meetings young people have had fun and started to get to know each other whilst working on serious issues. The Mini Influencers have their meetings first followed by the Influencers. The Mini influencers have an elected a chair and start their meetings with an icebreaker, The Mini Influencers have

discussed bullying during anti bullying week and made pledges. The Influencers are busy creating a letter to invite young people who come into care the opportunity to attend the Children In Care Council and become an influencer. Young people have discussed what we would like to consider in our annual survey and decided they wanted to focus on children and young peoples' health and wellbeing during Lockdown.

2. At our meeting we had the pleasure of meeting with Lesley Hudson the Interim Independent Reviewing Officer who came and spoke to the young people about helping to redesign the feedback forms used by the foster families Lesley chatted with the young people about her role whilst getting to know the young people. Young people have started to review the forms and give feedback.
3. At the Shadow Board on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2020, our young people had the opportunity to speak with their Corporate Parents around issues that impact on them and update them about the work they are doing around improving the services.
4. As part of our fun activities leading up to festive celebrations the young people have launched Mischievous Elf. Young people have been given Elves and they have been sending in pictures of their elf in fun places. All the Influencers who have attended the Children in Care Council Meeting received their individual Elf via the post. The young people loved their elves and have started having fun (See appendix 1). As part of fun things, as a festive celebration is not possible, young people have decided to have theirs on line, Young people will wear something festive, play games and have their dinner or treats all at the same time.

### Some quotes from young people



## 1.5 **Partnership working**

1. As a trailblazer for The Care Leavers Covenant we continue our partnership working. The Covenant recently interviewed a young person about life as a care leaver and their educational journey having registered with their portal, which offers tailored information specifically for the young person around their educational career interest. The young person found this to be a good experience and is looking forward to further interviews.

During National Care Leavers Celebration week 26<sup>th</sup> October to 2<sup>nd</sup> November, young people had the opportunity to attend the Virtual YPBMF (Young Peoples Bench Marking Forum) Care Leavers Celebration. We had fun and games through the use digital technology which brought many young people together. ( See Appendix 3 )

One young person said '***The young people's bench marking forum online event was brilliant so many inspirational young people with incredible stories and just so nice to see care leavers from all over the country doing positive things making a difference, making a difference leaving their mark***'

2. As part of the Regional Participation Working Group we now have Walsall young people who are active members alongside different local authorities' young people who will be contributing to developing a Regional Participation Strategy. Young people will play a key role in developing the forward section of the strategy looking at what they see as Participation and the importance of young people's involvement. Our young people had the opportunity to share the important work they are doing in Walsall and listen to what the other local authorities are doing. It was a fantastic networking opportunity as our young people will start to build peer networks. Our young people found the group very inspiring which created a buzz, enabling them to start to look creative ways of engagement.

A young person said '***I loved it, Hearing everyone's plans and ideas and outputs on so many different problems, It seemed very positive and ALL about the young people. Everyone listened well and respected ideas, couldn't have gone better***'

***'The things about young moms really touched me and brought a tear to my eye'***

3. We continue to partnership work with the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership. YSP (Youth Safeguarding Partners) have been meeting virtually and we are in the process of recruiting more young people across the service to strengthen the partnership to joint work with the Influencers of the Children in Care council.

## 1.6 **Celebrations and achievements of some of our young people:**

- ✓ Children in Care Council continue to thank all the professionals who make a difference in young people's life and have not stopped working through Lock down to keep children and young people safe.

- ✓ Well done to all our children and young people who have had a difficult time during lockdown but have continued to attend school, college and university. We know it has not been easy for many of you
- ✓ Well done to our new Mini Influencers, they have fun share ideas and welcome new members.

#### 1.7 **Total Respect Training:**

Total Respect Training is important as it enables professionals to work more effectively with children and young people. As we approach the new norm discussions with Training and Development has been undertaken to deliver the training online however further discussions need to be undertaken with the young people to ensure they are comfortable delivering the training in a new way.

#### 1.8 **Dates for forthcoming events and children in care council meetings.**

**9<sup>th</sup> Dec 2020**  
**16<sup>th</sup> Dec 2020**  
**6<sup>th</sup> Jan 2021**  
**13<sup>th</sup> Jan 2021**  
**27<sup>th</sup> Jan 2021**  
**10<sup>th</sup> Feb 2021**  
**24<sup>th</sup> Feb 2021**  
**10<sup>th</sup> Mar 2021**  
**24<sup>th</sup> Mar 2021**

**Some dates may be subject to changes and meetings will continue to be held virtually**

Finally we say farewell to the Children's Champion Michelle, who has supported the Children and Young People of Walsall over the last 2 years.

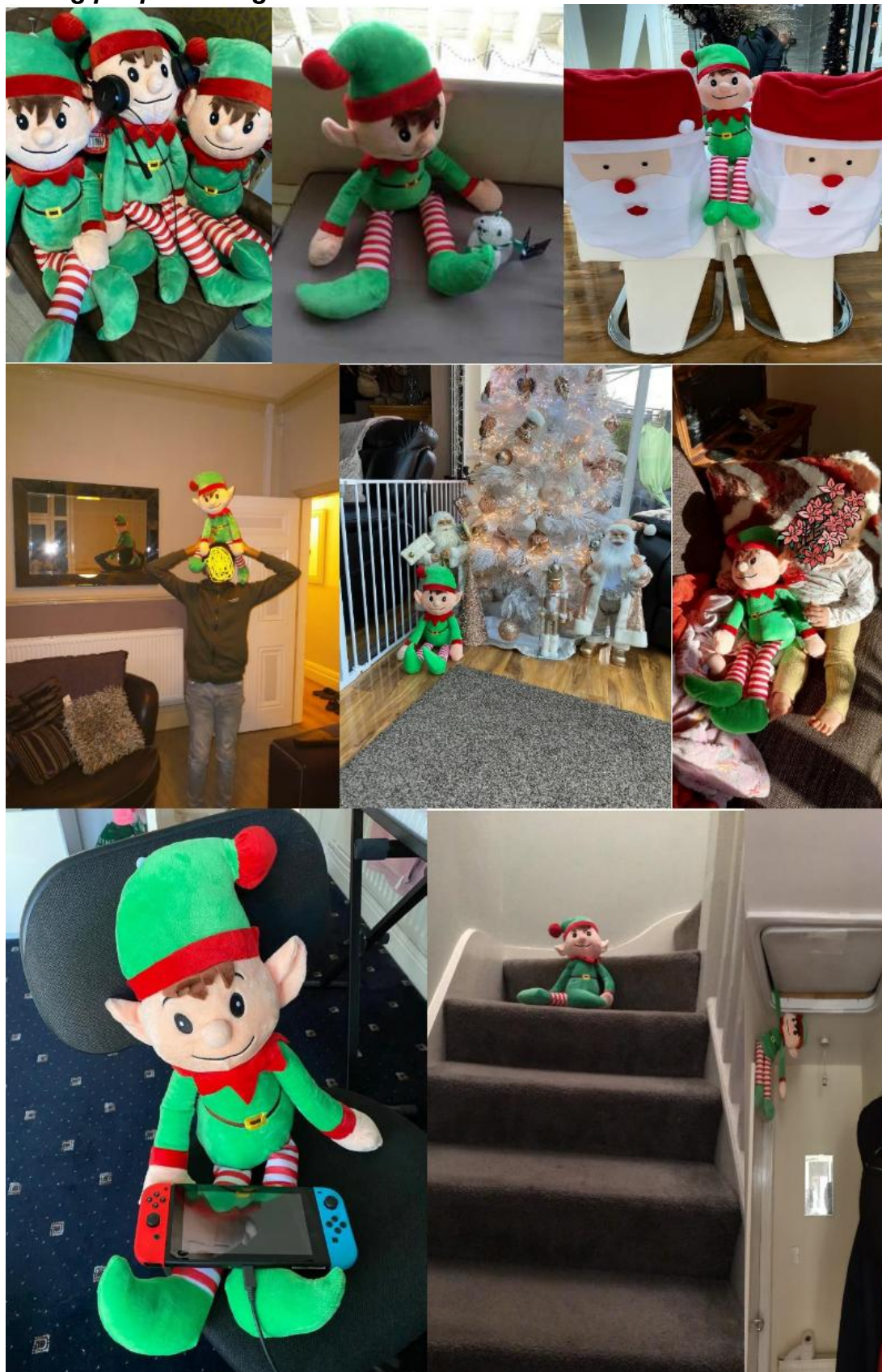
The Children's Champion would like to say a big farewell and thank you for all at the Corporate Parenting Board for their continued support of our young people.

Thank you Councillor Wilson for chairing the meetings that are always about being ambitions and having aspirations for our young people and would like to wish the new Children's Champion the very best and every success in their new role.



## Appendix 1

*Young people having festive fun with their Elf's.*







## Appendix 2

### ***Young Peoples Proposal for young people interview panel.***

#### **Proposal for Young people to be involved more in the recruitment process.**

The Influencers Children in Care Council would like to propose that when staff and foster carers are recruited by Walsall Council and they have involvement directly or indirectly with Children and families, that they are involved in the interview process or the training through a young people's panel.

The participation of children and young people in decision-making has been an important principle since the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1992). In particular, Article 12 of the UNCRC upholds the child's right to be heard. Children and young people can play a valuable role in the recruitment of staff within organisations.

The young people will be prepared for the interview process so they know what to expect. The Influencers Children in Care Council have discussed in their meetings the importance of being involved and think it is very important that you continue to listen to them and use their expertise to recruit the best staff who help look after Children and young people with Care experience.

#### **What young people say about being involved in the interview process?**

*'We do have a right to be involved in decisions about us the law tells us this'*

*'Involvement in panel interviews will allow others to see how interviewee interact with young people, so their communication and problem-solving skills can be assessed in a practical scenario'.*

*'It will also give interviewee a chance to become aware of the concerns young people have, such as meeting a new social worker'*

*'I feel more confident and it has helped me learn new skills'*

*'I have met new friends being involved in the panel and we have had fun'*

*'We feel we are being listened to as we are able to contribute to the decision making around people making decision about us young people'*

*'For the first time ever I really feel listened to'*

*'I feel really important when we interview staff at the Civic'*

#### **Benefits to the organisation include:**

Provides a clear message to existing staff, potential new recruits, funders, partner organisations, and young people, that the involvement and views of young people are at the heart of decision-making in Children's Social Care – improving service delivery by selecting candidates whose personal skills and qualities suit the needs of young people – demonstrating respect for children's rights in action (in line with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of a Child).

#### **The benefits to young people being on the Recruitment Panel.**

- Increased confidence
- Develops valuable skills that will help them in the future
- Young people feel valued, recognising they have contributed to appointing the best candidate to the service.

- Improves communication skills between adults and peers.
- Feel listened to
- Can bring structure to their day
- Gives young people a sense of achievement

***Our young people pictured preparing for the Young People's Interview Panel***



**Benefits to staff include:**

- Staff working creatively with young people helps them to develop creatively.
- Builds relationships between young people and staff
- Staff will have a greater insight into young people's views by communicating with and listening to them.

**What will candidates get from having young people interview them?**

Candidates can demonstrate communication/interaction skills with young people. Being interviewed by children and young people provides a realistic role preview for those who haven't previously worked with children and young people.

Candidates have a first-hand opportunities to interact with the young people they will be working with or providing services for.

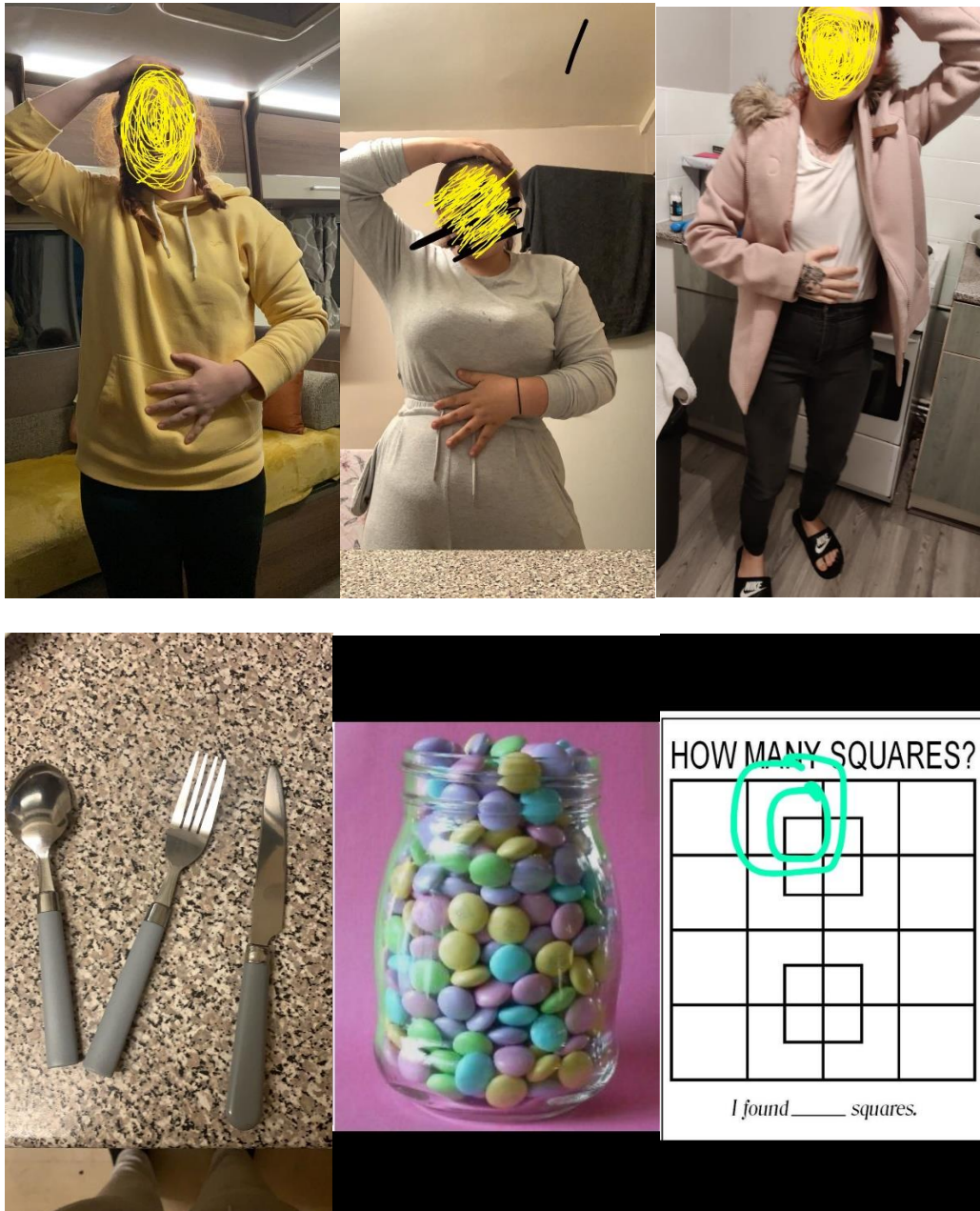
**What some candidates have said about being interviewed by young people.**

Feedback from candidates who had been interviewed by young people has been positive and commented afterwards that they had enjoyed the experience. Some have said they '**were nervous initially then felt relaxed when the young people made them feel at ease with their honest style of questioning**'. At the end of interviews many candidate complimented the young people on how well they had done and spoke about the benefits of having young people involved in the interview process. The Influencer's Children in Care Council would like you all to consider involving young people on the panel as it is important you work with us. We are a very **COMMITTED** group of young people who are Proud to represent care experienced children and young people of Walsall in contributing in influence the decision making.

If you would like to discuss our proposal further please contact the Chair of the  
Children Care Council or The Children's Champion to discuss further  
From  
The Influencers Children in Care Council

### Appendix 3

*During Care Leavers week young people got involved had some fun doing virtual challenges and games.*



<b>TITLE OF REPORT</b>	Summary of Audit of Health Passports/Histories in Walsall
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:</b>	The report to the Corporate Parenting Panel will provide a summary narrative of the offer of Health Passports to young people leaving care.
<b>IMPLICATIONS</b>	
<b>RECOMMENDATION TO THE COMMITTEE:</b>	
<b>CONFLICT OF INTEREST MANAGEMENT</b>	
<b>COMMITTEE ACTION REQUIRED:</b>	
<b>REPORT WRITTEN BY:</b>	Alison Jones Designated Nurse, Children Looked After. Assistance from – Zoe Morgan, Jivan Sembi, Michelle Cummings, Donna Smith.
<b>REPORT PRESENTED BY:</b>	Alison Jones Designated Nurse, Children Looked After
<b>REPORT SIGNED</b>	Sophie Read-Willetts

<b>OFF BY:</b>	Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children
<b>PREVIOUS COMMITTEES, DISCUSSION OR CIRCULATION</b>	

## **Report to Corporate Parenting Board Summary of Audit of Health Passports/Histories in Walsall**

The report to the Corporate Parenting Panel will provide a summary narrative of the offer of Health Passports to young people leaving care and identify views of young people following a small-scale audit of Health Passports

### **The Purpose of the Report**

- To provide the findings following an audit of the views of Young people receiving Health Passports Identify areas of the Health History Offer requiring improvement and make recommendations from the audit findings in relation to the planned refresh of Health passports by the health care provider in February 2021.
- To provide assurance to the Corporate Parenting Board that action is being taken to deliver ongoing improvements for care leavers to ensure they are equipped to manage their own health needs wherever possible.

### **What are Health Histories?**



Statutory guidance, “Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked After Children” (DFE 2015), states that young people leaving care should be able to continue to obtain health services and know how to do this. There should be a smooth transition to adulthood and access to health advice and services. Care leavers should be equipped to manage their own health needs wherever possible. It is also recommended for Care Leavers to have access to their health history, in a specific



recommendation from the “NICE SCIE PH 28 guidance for Looked After Children and Young People, Recommendation 48 states:-

- Ensure that when young people are offered their final statutory health assessment all available details of their medical history can be discussed.
  - Ensure young people are supported to understand their health and medical information.
  - Ensure young people are supported and encouraged to attend their final statutory health assessment.
  - Ensure that if a young person declines to attend their final statutory health assessment they are offered the choice of having a written copy of their basic medical history (such as immunisations and childhood illnesses).
  - A health professional, in partnership with the young person's social worker, ensures that the young person knows how to obtain their social care and detailed health history.
- Ensure that leaving-care services that support young people when they move on to independent living have a process to contact health professionals when necessary to help the young person understand the information in their health history.

These actions are jointly the responsibility of Social Workers, Social Work Managers, Leaving care teams and designated health professionals.

In Walsall, all care leavers have a completed leaving care summary and are given information about how they can access their health records. The health history is also offered at the final health assessment as a personal booklet. It is recognised that care leavers, are vulnerable to not having sufficient information about their own health. As well as having limited information about their family and any significant medical history, they sometimes have experienced unstable placements or had been placed out of borough. The Health Passport provides a concise account of a young person's health and any significant health issues. The Health Passport is a quick reference guide to confidential details about a young person's personal health. It is a unique document, which holds individual confidential information and can only be viewed with the permission of the young person who owns it.

### **Current Process**

Walsall CCG commission Walsall Healthcare Trust to provide a service to all Looked after Children (LAC). The LAC health team introduce the Health History/Passport to young people at aged 16. There is a clear pathway which informs the young person when to expect their health history and incorporates a conversation about preparing their health history

#### Age 16 years:

- If the child is living in borough or within 20 miles, health assessment to be completed by Nurse Advisor Transition & Leaving Care
- Health History document is discussed in annual health assessment
- Documented on Summary what has been discussed in regards to Health History document
- Added to Personal Health Plan as an action for Social Worker to discuss further with young person



#### Age 17 years:

- If the child is living in borough or within 20 miles, health assessment to be completed by Nurse Advisor Transition & Leaving Care
- Health History document is discussed in annual health assessment
- Basic template of "Health History" document shown to young person to discuss what is included and the benefits
- Documented on Summary what has been discussed in regards to Health History document
- Added to Personal Health Plan as an action for Social Worker to discuss further with young person



#### Aged 18 years:

- Letter is sent to young person from LAC Health admin on address given on discharge notification from Local Authority with vaccination summary, birth details and information in regards to Health History document and contact details for health
- Health History document completed with information ready to print and distribute to young person either directly or via Personal Advisor

Walsall Healthcare Trust updated the Health Passport for care leavers just over two years ago, due to a requirement to become an electronic document. This provided provision to save the details so that the young person could request another copy in the future if required. (The previous booklet handed to young people was hand written).

The current design and contents of the passport was produced in consultation with young people. The LAC health team will review the passport on a two yearly basis. As part of the review, an audit of the current process to identify gaps and enable a refresh of the Health Passport to be meaningful to the participants was completed jointly with children's services. The sample looked at 18 young people's Health Passports randomly selected from a cohort of care leavers in Q2 2019/20. Initially some questions were answered about the documents and more importantly, the audit incorporated the views of young people who had experienced living in care and who were young care leavers. The qualitative data provided will determine the final refresh of the document.

### **Methodology**

There were seven lines of enquiry identified by the Designated Nurse for LAC and Head of Service for Looked After Children from children's services. From the responses provided, the following statements were concluded:

All the young people are informed from age 16 at their health assessments, of the offer of a health history. This is documented on the health record.

- Generally, all of the care leavers agreed to receive a Health Passport. One young person did not agree to receive a Health Passport. The passport was offered in a different language to one young person.
- 79% of the cohort had received their passports at the time of the audit and a letter was sent to children's services confirming this. One young person had refused and another was waiting as there had been a delay in receiving information from archived records in another health authority, due to the young person living out of borough for some of their care experience.
- There was evidence on three children's records where their passport had been recorded on children's social care records (Mosaic).
- The pathway plan details the services and support needed by young people aged 16-21. There was limited evidence of health input in some of the pathway plans (seven children's pathway plans had evidence of health input, 11 children had no evidence.)
- In the cohort audited, seven children out of the 18 children were placed out of borough. This did not impact on them receiving a leaving care health history.

### **Consultation with Children and Young People**

An initial consultation was arranged with the Children's champion and the Designated Nurse LAC with a further discussion at a later date. These discussions were by either telephone or virtual meetings.

### **Feedback from discussion with Children's Champion**

There were 20 young people contacted as part of this review by the Children's Champion. Their views were sought virtually either via WhatsApp or phone calls. The young people were aged between 17 to 23 years. 13 young people responded:

Five young people are aged 17 years, one young person was aged 18 years, three young people are aged 19 years, and four young people are aged 20 years and older.

In addition, there was a discussion held at the Children in Care Council in relation to how the Health Passports could be improved. The discussion was an agenda item for meetings in November and December 2020.

The young people were asked about their understanding of the Health Passport. Responses provided were mixed, in terms of knowledge about the passport. Prior to the consultation discussion, it was explained to the young people the purpose of the Health Passports, who would have distributed their passport and the information held in them.

Further exploration with the young people was in respect of:

- Did the young people know about their entitlement to a Health Passport?
- Did they know who would complete their Health Passport?
- Did they find the information helpful?

**What some young people said:**

- ***'Is a health passport about your health?'***
- ***'Health passport, I don't think I received it'***
- ***'No I don't know'***
- ***'I can't remember, no'***
- ***'Think I have got one, only looked at it because the nurse showed me mine'***
- ***'I think I have one does it tell me my history?'***
- ***'I have a health passport, I have put it somewhere'***
- ***'I have never had one'***
- ***'I have had one but never look at it'***
- ***'I saw the looked after nurse but don't recall having one but it has been some time'***

Some young people who reviewed the passport did not find the design 'young people friendly' and said:

**'if there was more relevant visual representations around the subject matter young people would make more use of the resource as they would be able to relate to it more'.**

Further responses in respect of the information section included:

**‘If the possible risks involved in not being up to date with immunisations and unprotected sex were displayed in the passport. This may encourage young people to access services in the future, which will support good health’.**

When asked about the relevance of the Health Passport, responses included that their weight as a baby and any family health history was important. They questioned why the other information could not be accessed online, or on an interactive app, as young people tend not to read leaflets.

**They also said ‘if we can now access our doctor’s records online why are you giving us booklets that we would just put in a drawer?’**

Verbal responses from some of the young people identified said they saw some relevance to the Health Passport, making reference to their birth weight and any family health history. It was also identified that young people see that digital technology could be utilised to provide their Health Information through an app where it could be more interactive visually which would meet the needs of some young people who may struggle to read the information provided. It was suggested that this would make the digital Health Passport more inclusive to more young people.

**Nb. Young people now over the age of 21 would not have received a health passport as the LAC health team only starting producing this document three years ago; up to four of the young people questioned may not have received one.**

### **Feedback from discussion with Children’s Champion and Designated Nurse LAC**

The young people were given the opportunity to express their views as part of a virtual group meeting by the Children’s Champion and Designated Nurse for Looked After Children. The young people were all under the age of 18, so had not received a Health Passport.

The questions the young people were asked to focus on were:

How they felt the health assessments were conducted that they attended? Was it what they expected?

Were they told about having a health history? Were the questions they were asked relevant?

#### **What some young people said:**

- ‘Yes I know I am going to get one’
- ‘I like my health assessments to be quick and done’

- **‘They ask me about my school life’**
- **‘My health assessment questions are what I expect to be asked’**
- **“The assessment is tailored to people in care”**
- **“I know the nurses are trustworthy”**
- **“They said I will get one when I leave care”**

The Designated Nurse encouraged the group to consider all the factors that might influence their health and there was some discussions but little debate. It was decided with the group to develop a health champions meeting to encourage a good relationship with health professionals and health commissioners to ensure young people’s views are heard. It was recognised that young people need to be asked what was the most important and significant health information that they would want to see in a Health Passport. It will also be useful for examples of Health Passports to be looked at to see what works well and what does not. The Designated Nurse also spoke with a number of young people about the Review Health Assessments and some young people expressed no or little interest in the Health Passport.

## **Joint Findings**

There was limited evidence of either the Social Worker or the Personal Advisor being involved with the LAC Nurse in the co-production of the Health Passport with the young person.

Digital technology is now preferred by young people and extremely easy to access, although some young people did not feel it was necessary to tell them about some health issues as they could access themselves e.g. sexual health, how to find your local GP.

The Health Passports that were examined, there was considerable variation in the content of the Health Passports; some appeared to have very limited information. This may be due to having limited involvement with health, this needs further exploration.

It is not always possible to have access to family history. The young person is currently given information, so that at a later date they can get access to their own medical records. The health team can support the young person with this.

The young people who were consulted all agreed that the format needs updating and needs to be redesigned in collaboration with young people.

A copy of the Health Passport is not shared with children services. This needs to be considered if it aids working with the young person to address health issues or concerns with the young person by the Personal Advisor.

## **Recommendations for Consideration**

There needs to be a greater level of involvement of the Personal Advisor or Social Worker in the co-production of completing the Health Passport. This is a joint responsibility in helping young people to understand the significance of their health history.

There is a need for Personal Advisor's to review the last health summary. This would inform them of any current health issues.

The current design of the Health Passport is not popular and needs to be redesigned with input from young people.

LAC Nurses should have an input on pathway plans of all children.

Consideration of commencing Health History on entering care or before age 16 to include more information.



## **Conclusion**

The audit and consultations have given some findings and recommendations to assist when the Health Histories/Passport are refreshed in February 2021. Other priorities identified were:

- Consider the use of technology – apps.
- Consultation around implementation and introduction earlier than age 16 for some children and young people.
- Consideration will be given to the use of a continuum document maintained with the support from Foster Carers.

The Health Passport provides a young person with knowledge about their own health history. However, it is apparent that not all young people identify the current Health Passport as a meaningful record. Further consultation will be carried out to identify a revised passport that provides the detail and design required by young people.

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.

## **Contact Officers**

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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







# The Promise

## Older children and Care Leavers aged 16-25

By listening to our care experienced young people, we have developed a list of 'Promises' that form our Pledge to you as children in our care. A pledge is an important part of running a service for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. It tells Children and Young People what we promise to do for them as their Corporate Parents.

### Education, Training & Employment



- We promise to help you with your education and with finding the right employment and training opportunities.
- We promise to encourage and support you into college or university and give you clear information about the support you can expect.
- We promise to ensure that you have opportunities for work experience and employment such as apprenticeships and traineeships.
- We promise to support you to have different experiences and access to activities that may interest you

### Keeping you safe



- We promise to help you to decide where you want to live and will help to keep you safe and comfortable
- We promise to help you to stay with your foster carers if this is possible.
- We promise to help you to manage your money and ensure you have financial stability ready for your future
- We promise to help you to get important documents like passports and driving licence
- We promise to pay for your council tax, even if you live outside of Walsall Council
- We promise to provide you with opportunities to build your confidence so that you are able to make your own decisions about your safety

### Keeping you healthy



- We promise to help you to access health services and have access to your health passport
- We promise to go with you to health appointments and support you if you need it
- We promise to help you to access local leisure facilities to help you keep fit and well.
- We promise to make sure you have someone to talk to or can access support with your mental wellbeing

### Keeping in touch



- We promise to help you to keep in contact with people that are important to you
- We promise to celebrate your achievements with you
- We promise to respect you as individuals and have high aspirations for your future
- We promise that you will always have someone to contact



# Local Offer for Care Leavers

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The Local Offer is where you will find information to support care leavers aged 18 – 21, and 25 if in education or training



#26





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## What it's all about?

Nobody said that growing up was easy, being in care can make life more complicated and additional support and guidance may be required. We understand that leaving care is a time of big changes in your life, and you will have many questions about the support you can get and the services that are available to you.

This guide will help you understand the support that we have here in Walsall for you as a Care Leaver. We want to make sure that you feel supported and you know who to go to for advice and support.



## The Legal bit... explaining your rights

In 2018 the government introduced new laws to ensure that any care leaver (up to the age of 25 years old) who wants and needs support from a Personal Advisor could get one. This has helped us to look at how we can make our services for Care Leavers better. We have been working together with different services, partners and care leavers to make sure that we have the right support available, at the right time to help and that it is easy to understand and access. As a Local Authority we are your Corporate Parents, this may seem like a strange term but it means that we are here to offer you the support and guidance that others would expect from a reasonable parent. More importantly, you have the right to be involved in all decisions about your plans for leaving care.

To be able to get support set out in this leaflet, you must have been in care for a period of at least 13 weeks (or periods amounting to 13 weeks) which began after age 14 and included some time after your 16th Birthday. If you are not sure whether you qualify for support then you can ask your Personal Advisor or Social Worker for further guidance.

### National care Leavers Charter

The Government has published a Care Leavers Charter which young people like you helped to draw up. This is a set of pledges which Walsall Council agrees to and with this we promise:

- To respect and honour your identity
- To believe in you
- To listen to you
- To inform you
- To support you
- To find you a home
- To be a lifelong champion

### For full details of the Charter visit:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-leavers-charter](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-leavers-charter)



## Your Personal Advisor

Your Social Worker will be responsible for supporting you up until you reach the age of 18. At 17, you will be provided with a Personal Advisor that will start to work alongside your Social Worker to support you in your transition into adult life. Once you have discussed your wishes and ideas with your workers, together you will draw up a Pathway Plan to cover the different parts of your life you may need support with. This may be your education, training and employment, where you will live, your health, money and other personal support needs.

Since April 2018, Care Leavers have the right to Personal Advisor support up to the age of 25. Their role is to help you prepare for independence and the amount of support they can offer will depend on what you want and your circumstances. Until you reach 21, your Personal Advisor will see you at least once every 2 months and will keep in contact with you in between visits.

## Pathway Plans

We will start helping you to develop your Pathway Plan from the age of 16. This will set out what support you will need prior to moving into independence. It is important that you are involved in this plan as it will set out what you want to achieve and how we will support you to do this. This plan will be reviewed every 6 months as part of your ongoing care planning and can be changed in order to fit in with your needs.

You may also wish to be provided with an advocate or other support such as peer mentors. This is something that we will aim to provide. You may also wish to be included in the Children in Care Council whilst you are still in care. If you are interested then you can contact our Children's Champion Michelle Cummings on 01922 650555 ext 5710 or 07787 284 682 or email [Michelle.Cummings@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:Michelle.Cummings@walsall.gov.uk)



Housing

Whatever happens, your Social Worker and Personal Advisor should help you to find suitable accommodation for when you leave care.

What is suitable accommodation?

Suitable accommodation is somewhere that is safe and right for you and should be somewhere that will help you to develop your skills as you transition into adulthood. Many young people feel that they must have their own property by law, but this is not the case and having the responsibility of this at an early age may not be right for you. There are a number of housing options for young people to consider and this will have been discussed with you as part of your pathway plan. Some of the options available to you may be:



**Supported Accommodation**

This is where you live independently but with staff on hand to support you. There are different arrangements on offer and may include shared houses, bedsits, small projects with self contained flats or even student accommodation or as part of an apprenticeship.

**Staying with your foster carer/Staying put**

If you are living with foster carers, there may be an option for you to remain living with them after you turn 18. This is called Staying Put arrangements and will have been discussed with both you and your carers as part of your pathway planning.

**Homelessness**

As a Care Leaver, Walsall has a duty to give you help and guidance to prevent you from becoming homeless. If you are feeling worried or concerned about this or are struggling to manage where you are living then advice and support is available. Please speak to your Personal Advisor immediately if you are worried.

**Residential Care**

You may need to stay on in Residential care if this is felt the best way to give you the support that you need.

**Tips about choosing the right kind of accommodation**

Things that need to be considered when choosing the right accommodation should include:

- Is it near to college, work, family and friends?
- How do you feel about sharing a kitchen and living areas with other people?
- What kind of support do you need – someone to talk to every day or as and when you need it?
- What are your responsibilities – how will you pay your bills and maintain your property such as cleaning and ensuring it remains a safe place to live?

**Own Tenancy**

This is a big responsibility and it may not be the best option immediately when leaving care. In Walsall we will ensure that you have priority housing and can consider a tenancy for you to carry on in your own right once you turn 18 as part of a current arrangement with Walsall Housing Group. A tenancy is a legal document which entitles a person to live in a property and outlines the responsibilities that go with this. There are different types of tenancy agreements and this can be confusing. Always make sure that you keep a copy and that you have understood it before signing. Your Personal Advisor will support you in doing this. We will also be able to help you maintain your tenancy and will offer advice and guidance on how you can pay your bills. In Walsall you will be exempt from paying your council tax until you reach the age of 25, even if you live outside of Walsall Whatever you decide what is right for you, we can help you to move in and you can use your setting up home grant in order to buy furniture and other things that you may need. All of this will be done with the support of your Personal Advisor.

Education, Training and Employment

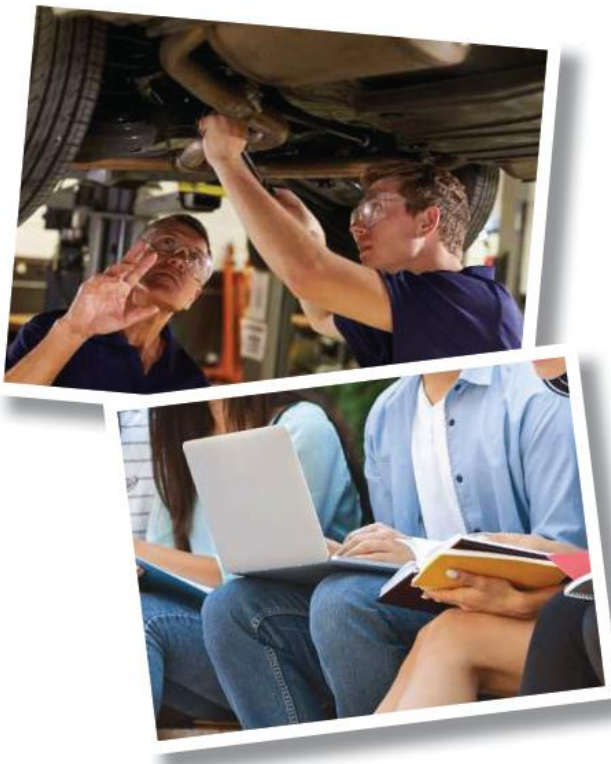
We want every young person leaving care to have the support to fulfil their goals in life and we want you to have the skills and experience you need to become a successful and independent person. You may have an idea as to what sort of career you want and the type of work that you would like to do. Whatever your goal, your Personal Advisor can support you in accessing this.

You may decide you want to:

- Stay on at school
- Go to college
- Start an apprenticeship
- Get a job
- Go to university
- Get some work experience or do some voluntary work

Whether you are thinking of studying or wishing to enter the workforce, there are a number of options available to you and we are on hand to offer the right guidance and support. We can support you to draw up a CV and as an employer, Walsall Council have a range of apprenticeships that you can consider applying for. There is also the Care Leavers Covenant that links in with local businesses that can offer employment and work experience opportunities. There is a dedicated Impact worker based at the TLC Hub that can support you with employment and training opportunities.

We can also take you to college and university open days so that you can see what is on offer and whether you would wish to consider attending.



Other useful contacts:	
<a href="http://www.direct.gov.uk">www.direct.gov.uk</a> (Education and Training)	<a href="http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk">www.apprenticeships.org.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.gov.uk">www.gov.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.princes-trust.org.uk">www.princes-trust.org.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.nationalcareleaversservice.direct.gov.uk">www.nationalcareleaversservice.direct.gov.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.totaljobs.com">www.totaljobs.com</a>
<a href="http://www.jobsite.co.uk">www.jobsite.co.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.wmjobs.co.uk">www.wmjobs.co.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.monster.com">www.monster.com</a>	<a href="http://www.jobs4u.co.uk">www.jobs4u.co.uk</a>

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Money Matters

As part of your Pathway Plan we will help you to understand how to manage your finances. We can help you to open a bank account, formulate a budget plan, help you claim the correct benefits and provide you with all the information in regards to your financial entitlements as a care leaver. Some of these include:

- If you are aged 16 and 17 and living in supported accommodation and are unable to claim for benefits, you will be offered a weekly allowance equivalent to state benefits and wherever possible this will be paid into your bank accounts.
- You are entitled to be provided with a setting home grant of up to £2000. This can be used for you to pay for essential furniture and other items.
- Support to access your Junior ISA
- We will provide you with an annual festival payment of £50.
- You will receive a gift for your birthday of £25 (when you are 19 or 20 years of age), £50 on your 18th and 21st.
- Support you to meet the extra ordinary costs of travel to maintain contact with family or previous carers to promote relationships and reduce isolation.
- Pay for the first key documents such as a passport or driving licence.
- Consider addition payment towards travel costs, book's and equipment for those of you in apprenticeships and further education, this will be based on individual need and your Personal Advisor will give me more advice on this.
- Those of you in further education offered a small financial reward of £50 for demonstrated effort.

You may also be entitled to some welfare benefits. This is a provision from the Department for Work and Pensions for people either looking for work or on a low income. This includes benefits such as universal credit, job seekers allowance, income support and employment support allowance. Walsall 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 your benefits.

Other useful contacts:
<a href="http://www.gov.uk/benefits">www.gov.uk/benefits</a>
<a href="http://www.studentfinancedirect.co.uk">www.studentfinancedirect.co.uk</a>



Health and wellbeing

Your physical and mental health is important and so we will support you in accessing relevant services that can assist you in living a healthy and happy lifestyle. In order to do this we will:

- Provide you with an up to date health passport
- Help you to register with a GP and Dentist local to where you live and attend any medical appointments with you if necessary.
- We can offer you advice and support around your sexual health. Walsall Integrated Sexual Health (WiSH) is a local service that offers drop in advice, free emergency contraception and sexual health screening.
- We can offer you advice and support in regards to drug and alcohol misuse and help you to engage with services that have specialist support such as the Beacon (CGL).
- Help you to identify and engage with sports clubs and any extra curricular activities that you may be interested in.

In addition to this, we will ensure that your Personal Advisor supports you to access counselling services. Walsall Talking Therapies (Walsall and Dudley Mental Health Trust) is open to anyone over the age of 17 who is registered with a Walsall GP. You can also self-refer online or use the free phone number 0800 953 0995. Walsall Council also has a licence to enable you to access an online counselling service. com This is an online counselling service that is a free, confidential, safe and an anonymous way to ask for help. The service is for young people up to the age of 25 and is available from 12 noon to 10 pm Monday to Friday and from 6 pm to 10 pm at weekends.

Other useful contacts:	
<a href="http://www.youngminds.org.uk">www.youngminds.org.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.healthline.com">www.healthline.com</a>
<a href="http://www.wclld.co.uk">www.wclld.co.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.walsallsexualhealth.co.uk">www.walsallsexualhealth.co.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.changegrowlive.org.uk">www.changegrowlive.org.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.rehab4addiction.co.uk">www.rehab4addiction.co.uk</a>



Relationships

As well as the support you will receive from your Personal Advisor, we may be able to offer you additional practical and emotional support. The Transitions and Leaving Care Hub runs a drop in service every fortnight where you can come along. This is a safe space where you can meet other young people and engage in activities. In addition to this you will be notified of specific events/activities including sports, cooking, CV writing, arts and crafts and many more. Any ideas that you may have for future activities will be appreciated so please share these with your Personal Advisor.



We will also help you to manage or regain contact with people special to you or have cared for you in the past like family members and friends, foster carers, residential staff or social workers.

Participation in Society

We want our Care Leavers to be active members of society and to have the chances that all young adults have. We want you to feel part of a community and be proud of where you live. Your views and experiences are important and we want you to have the opportunity to share them with us to make things better for you and others in the future. The Children in Care Council offers volunteering opportunities, support and the chance to meet other young people with similar experiences. Your Personal Advisor will help you to enrol on the local electoral register so that you can have a say and vote on issues that impact you and your community. We will also encourage you to get involved in shaping services, in challenging discrimination or barriers you may face as a care leaver and make sure your voice is heard and you are listened to. We will also advise you how to access the Advocacy Service or contact the Coram Advocacy Service, both of which are independent of the council.

We always want to hear from you about how you are getting on and we are proud of you and what you can achieve. We hope that we have done things well but recognise that there is always room for improvement. This is why it is important that you have your say and share your experiences. We would encourage you to take up as many of the opportunities on offer and make the most of the advice, information and support that is available to you. If you need any further information or wish to discuss anything that is outlined in this offer then please speak to your Personal Advisor.

Contacts:	
<a href="http://www.nyas.net">www.nyas.net</a> ( <i>National Youth Advocacy Service</i> )	<a href="http://www.rights4u.org">www.rights4u.org</a>
<a href="http://www.coramvoice.org.uk">www.coramvoice.org.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.mind.org.uk">www.mind.org.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help-you/contact-us">www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help-you/contact-us</a>	<a href="http://www.stbasils.org.uk">www.stbasils.org.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.shelter.org.uk">www.shelter.org.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.nhs.org">www.nhs.org</a>
<a href="http://www.do-it.org">www.do-it.org</a> ( <i>Volunteer service</i> )	<a href="http://www.becomecharity.org.uk">www.becomecharity.org.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk">www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk">www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk</a> ( <i>Guidance and support in respect of your entitlements as a care leaver</i> )







Housing and accommodation needs for Care Leavers

### **Executive Summary**

This report sets out the summary of findings of a joint audit undertaken by Money Home Job and Children's Services in respect of children leaving care as they transition into adulthood.

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

To inform the Board of the key findings of the joint audit and how this may revise the Local Offer for care leavers.

### **Recommendations**

- The Board is asked to note the Corporate Parenting responsibilities of the Council with regard to ensuring Care Leavers have suitable accommodation.
- To endorse the proposed recommendations and set out in the report.

**Background papers:** None

### **Resource and legal considerations**

Local authority duties to young people and care leavers are set out in the following legislation:

Children Act 1989

Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

Children and Social Work Act 2017

Homelessness Act 2002

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

### **The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Homelessness Act 2002 (HA 2002)**

seeks to ensure that local authority children's social care and housing departments work together to ensure that the accommodation needs of care leavers are met and care leavers have priority need status.

**The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000** sets out various duties that local authorities have towards young people in and leaving care, including those relating to accommodation. The duties are

- plan with young people and involve them in decisions
- avoid moving young people who are settled
- assess young people's needs and prepare them for any move
- ensure that the accommodation meets any needs relating to impairment
- consider education, training and employment needs
- where practicable, offer a choice of accommodation
- set up a package of support to go with the accommodation
- have a clear financial plan for the accommodation and a contingency plan

**The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017** introduced new duties so that everyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness will have access to meaningful help, irrespective of their priority need status, as long as there are eligible for assistance:

- A new 'Duty to Refer' on named public bodies to ensure that services are working together earlier and effectively to prevent and relieve homelessness.
- Improved advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness and services are designed to meet the needs of particular groups that are at increased risk of becoming homeless, including care leavers and people released from prison or youth detention accommodation
- Extension of the period 'threatened with homelessness' from 28 to 56 days
- New duties to 'prevent' and 'relieve' homelessness for all eligible people, regardless of priority need and intentionality. Both duties last for up to 56 days. The 56 day period can be extended for anyone under the 'prevention' duty where homelessness is still a threat and could be extended for anyone who does not have a 'Priority Need' under the 'relief' duty
- Interim temporary accommodation will only be offered to people who are or may be: eligible, homeless and 'Priority Need'. Temporary Accommodation under the 'Main duty' is only offered to people who are eligible, homeless, 'Priority Need' and not intentionally homeless
- Assessments and creation of personalised housing plans, setting out the actions or 'reasonable steps' housing authorities and individuals will take to secure accommodation
- All care leavers under the age of 21 will be considered as having a local connection with an area if they were looked after, accommodated or fostered there for a continuous period of at least two years, which started at some point before their 16th birthday.

## **Reducing inequalities**

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017- 2020 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**

We have undertaken wider consultation as part of our review with practitioners and foster carers and these are included in the findings of this audit.

The views of our young people have been central to the audit and have been ascertained by the Children's Champion during November 2020. The finding of the consultation with Young People are set out in Appendix 1

## **Contact Officer:**

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## **Leaving Care: Housing and accommodation needs for Care Leavers**

### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 The journey out of care is a particularly important, and sometimes challenging transition. Most young people rely on their families for emotional and practical support when they make this transition, which usually takes place well into adulthood. The Office of National Statistics report that two-thirds of 16 to 24 year olds were still living at home (ONS 2019). In contrast, care leavers often live independently much earlier than their peers. When children become looked after it is important that they are helped to develop life skills from a young age so they can acquire independent life skills that enable them to be ready to make that transition.
- 1.2 When we are not able to engage with children effectively to implement a plan of transition, this can impact on their readiness for living independently. For transition planning to be effective, children need to be living in stable homes before they make their transition into adulthood. They need a robust plan of transition. For many young people, their transition to adulthood can be extended and delayed until they are emotionally and financially ready, or they have the qualifications they need and aspire to.
- 1.3 Securing suitable accommodation for care leavers is therefore much more than just finding them somewhere to stay. Care leavers need to be well prepared to live independently and their housing needs must be addressed before they leave care by effective pathway planning which considers their most appropriate accommodation options as they leave care. As corporate parents ensuring that we have the range of options including their housing needs requires effective partnership working across departments and agencies.
- 1.4 There are a range of factors that should be considered when assessing the young person's readiness to live independently and include:
- the young person's wishes and feelings.
  - the particular accommodation and support needs of the young person.
  - the personal characteristics and experiences of the young person.
  - the risks to the young person if s/he becomes homeless.
  - their existing support network of the young person.
- 1.5 For many young people, there is a transition period between leaving care either from a children's home, supported accommodation or foster care and taking up their own tenancy. Some young people will either "stay put" with their foster carers or live in semi-independent or supported living accommodation until they move into their own accommodation. Young people leaving care have a range of accommodation options
1. Staying Put arrangement is where young people remain with their existing foster carers until they are ready to live independently. A staying put arrangement is not the same as a foster placement. The young person staying put must be a former relevant child who is no longer a looked after child. The foster carer is no longer acting in the capacity of foster carer for that young adult; they are their 'former foster carer'. The foster placement becomes a

‘staying put arrangement’ and is not governed by fostering services regulations.

2. Supported Lodgings provide a young person with a room of their own in a private home where they are a member of the household. The householder, or host, provides a safe and supportive environment, working alongside professional services to help and support the young person in gaining skills for independent adult life.
3. Return back to their families: Most young care leavers have contact with their birth family and for many of our children in care we would seek to secure this as part their planning before they leave care. Some young people will choose to return home when they leave care, sometimes for a short period of time, or long term. However, should young person want to change their decision, they will be supported to find alternative arrangements.
4. Supported accommodation is often seen as a stepping-stone towards independence and provides accommodation for young people aged 16 and 17 years to prepare them for their transition into independence and moving into their own accommodation. This form of accommodation is not registered with Ofsted. Walsall is part of a regional framework working with a wide range of providers for such accommodation. Young people will have their own room and can sometimes share or have their own kitchen and bathroom. Young people may have on site support from staff or floating support which can be tailored to meet the young person’s needs. Young people will be supported to develop life and independence skills.
5. Transition to Assisted Living Arrangements or Shared Lives. Many young people leaving care have a higher level of support needs. Some may have learning or physical disabilities or mental or physical health needs. They need for bespoke or specialist provision.

Some young people can either remain with their former foster cares under the Shared Lives scheme or can be matched with an approved carer prior. Shared Lives scheme have to be registered with the Care Quality Commission. Carers are trained and vetted by the scheme.

Young people are generally referred to the Adult Social Care Services at age 15 years and 6 months birthday to enable relevant assessments to be undertaken by Adult Services. Generally, Adult Social Care Services commence those assessments when the young person is aged 17 years and older.

We recognise that there is a need to improve transition planning and in view of this there is a multi-agency review in progress to improve the transition pathways with Health, Education and Local Authority partners.

6. Social Housing accommodation is provided at affordable rates, on a secure basis to people on low incomes or with particular needs. In Walsall, there are a range of Registered Social Landlords who own housing properties, with the largest providers being Walsall Housing Group and Accord.

The Council has developed Young Person's Housing Scheme in partnership with Walsall Housing Group which was first introduced in 2010. This provides **60 units** to Young People who are at risk of becoming homeless. The aim of the scheme is to support young people to maintain independence and prevent future cycles of homelessness with the end goal being they are able to succeed in making their tenancy permanent. Support is provided by Housing and Welfare Officers located in Money Home Job and a Young Person's Temporary Accommodation Officer from WHG, who work in partnership to assist the young people to achieve goals, develop independent living skills, support with education/employment training, and all aspects that are required to enable a successful transition into independent living.

Children's Services and Walsall Housing Group have secured a further **16** units under the Young Person's Housing Scheme in 2019. The key difference is that Children's Services have access to housing which is targeted for care leavers who are ready to live independently prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. They are supported by the WHG Young Person's Temporary Accommodation Officer, their Personal Advisor and where necessary additional floating support is spot purchased. This has enabled over 14 young people to move on from supported accommodation or foster care in the last 12 months. This housing option prepares young people for independence with support from their Social Worker and Personal Advisor. Young people are identified as being suitable at the Housing Pathway Panel and around 17 years and independent accommodation will be identified for the young person. They will move in with support, initially from both Children's Services and WHG or additional floating support. At some point after their 18th birthday, they take over the tenancy. The 'cliff edge' at 18 is minimised and support is on-going based on the young person's needs and they don't need to physically move in order to have their own tenancy.

Care leavers can access either scheme and their nomination is presented by their social worker or personal advisor to the Housing Pathway Panel which meets monthly with representatives from WHG, Money Home Job, Children's Commissioning and Children's Services. Based on the assessment and readiness to live independently the young person's need for housing could be met through the Young Person's Scheme.

7. Temporary accommodation - Care leavers who are vulnerable or at risk of homelessness have a 'priority need' and must be provided with temporary accommodation if this is needed. Temporary accommodation is provided whilst a full assessment is carried out. There are limited options for temporary accommodation within Walsall and that can mean that young people can be placed outside of the Borough either because there is limited capacity or their needs cannot be met locally. We would only seek to place care leavers in temporary accommodation as a 'last resort' and would always seek to provide young people with permanent accommodation based on their needs.

**Rivers House** is temporary accommodation (TA) provision which is owned by the Council and supports young people who are homeless and have made a homeless application in Walsall. This accommodation consists of 14 self-contained units, with 4 units being situated separately but on the same complex. The four units are utilised as temporary accommodation "move on"



for our tenants as they have gained more independence and require a reduced amount of support. Rivers House has staffing cover for 24 hours a day over a 7 day week. The staff situated at Rivers House work alongside the young person whilst they are temporarily accommodated and support development in life skills, education, money management and becoming tenancy ready to enable them the best opportunity to have sustainable tenancies moving forward.

8. Private Rented Accommodation: private rented properties can vary hugely in quality and affordability for people on low incomes or benefits and as a service securing a accommodation in the private sector is not a preferred option and would only be utilised in exceptional circumstances.
9. Bed and Breakfast: Care leavers are never placed directly from leaving care into Bed and Breakfast accommodation. However there are some rare instances when young people have exhausted all other types of accommodation.

## **2.0 Joint Audit of Young People Leaving care**

- 2.1 A joint audit of transition planning for children leaving care was undertaken with Children's Social Care Services and Money Home Job in September and October 2020. The audits were undertaken by Housing and Children's Social Care Officers. A random sample of 50 young people between the ages of 17 and 19 years who left care or were going to leave care between August 2018 and July 2020 was selected to review how well we supported young people to achieve their outcomes.
- 2.2 As part of this audit we have held focus groups in November and December 2020 involving foster carers, social workers and personal advisors which included colleagues from Walsall Housing and Probation's Resettlement Team. The Children's Champion has also sought the views of young people as part of this consultation. .
- 2.3 There were equal numbers of males and females and the audits provided considerable evidence where transitions had worked well as well as areas where we need to strengthen joint working with housing. The young people in this audit were living in a broad range of accommodation or in custody or within family settings with either their parents or former foster carers.

Of the 50 young people reviewed

- 2 Young people who had left care at 18 did not qualify for leaving care support as they had been in care for less than 13 weeks. Both young people have returned to the care of their families.
- 13 Young people remained with their former foster carers either under Staying Put or with Shared Lives carers (3) who were their foster carers.
- 7 Young people were living with their parents (6) or friends (1)
- 5 Young people are living in specialist adult services provision.

2 Young People were in temporary accommodation in Walsall.

8 Young people were residing in supported accommodation.

2 Young people are in custody

11 Young people are living in social housing (9) or privately rented (2) accommodation.

### 3.0 **Learning from the Audit. Focus Groups and Young People's feedback.**

3.1 Learning from this audit has highlighted three key areas where we need to improve transition planning for our care leavers.

- **Staying Put Planning and Support**
- **Preparation for living independently**
- **Supporting care leavers to move into settled accommodation as they leave care or when they are in custody.**

### 3.2 **Suitability of accommodation:**

We have a requirement to report to Department of Education whether young people are living in suitable accommodation annually.

*"Accommodation is to be regarded as suitable if it provides safe, secure and affordable provision for young people. It would generally include short-term accommodation designed to move young people on to stable long-term accommodation, but would exclude emergency accommodation used in a crisis."*

Positively no young person within this cohort had been placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. 2 young people were in accommodation that was deemed to be unsuitable accommodated, one young person was in custody and another young person was living with family members. This young person has now secured settled housing accommodation.

### 3.3 **Staying Put planning and Support to former foster carers:**

A staying put arrangement is not the same as a foster placement. The foster carer is no longer acting in the capacity of foster carer for that young adult; they are their 'former foster carer'. The foster placement becomes a 'staying put arrangement' and is not governed by fostering services regulations. For some foster carers who then stop fostering their individualised support from a supervising social worker ceases. In Walsall, there is a long history of young people remaining with staying put carers. Carers are paid a standard payment to which the young person will make a weekly contribution based on the individual circumstance of the young person.

3.4 Overall at the end of November 2020 there were **19** young people living with their former foster carers in staying put arrangements. Majority of our young people

remained with their former foster carers who are Walsall carers (12) and for 7 young people their former foster carers were registered with an Independent Fostering Agency. Staying put arrangements can either be short term or up to the age of 21 year in line with the young person's pathway plan.

3.5 Since April 2020, 11 staying put arrangements have ceased and the majority of these were time limited arrangements to support the young person's transition plan. Of these 2 young people are now at University and their current plan reflects that they would return to their carers during vacation time, 6 young people moved on to live independently in line with their plan and 1 young person is now aged 21. For 2 young people their staying put arrangement ceased because they wanted to live elsewhere and one of these young people returned to live with their staying put carer in November 2020.

3.6 As part of the Audit we reviewed the progress of 10 young people in staying put arrangements. It is evident that for all of the young people the continuity built on their attachments to their carers, so that they can move to independence at their own pace and be supported to make the transition to adulthood in a more gradual way. This arrangement was considered as part of the care planning for young people over a period of time and endorsed by their Independent Reviewing Officers. The audits evidenced that their needs continued to be met and the young people are thriving.

We also reviewed the care plan for one young person whose staying put arrangement ceased within 3 months of their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. This arrangement required a greater level of support when difficulties arose. This could have been anticipated and appropriate support may have maintained the arrangement.

3.7 The learning from the audit identified that there was not sufficient focus on

- The timing of "Living Together Agreement" which details the arrangements and expectations negotiated between the young person and the Staying Put carer regarding the payment of personal contribution, coming home times, what meals are included, whether friends can visit or stay overnight etc.
- The support that the Staying Put carers will require during the course of their arrangement.
- Consider if we can improve the Staying Put offer to incentivise foster carers to enable young people to remain with them.

3.8 **Consultation with our foster carers:**

- There was variable practice amongst social workers in setting up the staying put arrangements.
- The agreements were not planned appropriately
- They were set up too late
- The support they received was variable.

3.9 **Actions:**

1. Review of Walsall's Staying Put practice guidance and process. This will be undertaken in consultation with the young people, their foster carers and practitioners. The Review will also consider the second report of the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leaver's published in November 2020.

**Timescales for completion: April 2021**

#### 4.0 **Preparation for independence**

4.1 Leaving home is a challenging time for all young people, whatever their circumstances. However, young people with experience of the care system have experienced adversity, and often share distinct vulnerabilities and needs. The need to ensure that we plan and prepare our young people through this transition period with the help of a supportive network to draw upon is imperative.

4.2 The audit considered whether the planning was specific to the needs of the young person and how well the young person was encouraged to develop life and independent living skills so they are prepared for leaving care, for example, self-care, cooking, budgeting and managing their tenancy, being in work or education/ training. We expected to see this recorded on their pathway plans.

4.3 Auditors found:

1. There was good evidence of individualised preparation for independence and life skills depending on the assessed needs of the young person. Records referenced Catch 22 Get Ready for Adult Life (GRAL) workbook.
2. All young people's pathway plans evidenced the progress young people were making and identifying what further work was required to make in securing independence, self-care and life skills.
3. Personal advisors were proactive in supporting young people with appointments to secure benefits, viewing accommodation options, and managing money and budgeting, helping young people to move into their accommodation and supporting with practical matters such as putting furniture together etc.
4. Some audits evidenced certificates of achievement being awarded when independence preparation work had been completed and this supported their housing applications with Housing providers
5. Personal Advisors were proactive in considering how emotional support could be built into the young person's network.

6. There was evidence of transition planning meetings in place between the child's social worker and the personal advisor setting out the respective actions and goals
7. There was evidence of personal advisors attended multi-disciplinary care planning meetings for young people with complex needs particularly where the transition arrangements involved adult health and social care services.
8. Some of our young people who are parents and as such their support and preparation for living independently has to encompass help and support to care and safeguard their child. We found evidence of support and care provided by the personal advisors but this was not referenced in their pathway plans nor were other key universal or specialist agencies sited in the pathway plans.
9. The auditors found that pathway plans did not always evidence the collective role of provider, housing and tenancy support officers, other agencies ( e.g. mental health services, adult services), or other support networks in the support that the young person required, though this was evident in other parts of the young person's records, for example, correspondence, case notes and supervision records. The actions required by the Personal Advisors were clearly evident in the Pathway Plans.

#### **4.4 The learning from the audit identified the following**

- Developing life and independence skills need to be embedded in care planning meetings through the child and young person's care journey.
- We need to embed a structured life and independence living skills toolkit which starts around 13 years recognising that children acquire life skills as they achieve their developmental milestones. This will be supported by training which is utilised by foster carers, key workers, independent reviewing officers', social workers and personal advisors.
- We explore the option of developing training flats for young people to have an opportunity to with some support experience living alone, manage money and assist young people in understanding more about living more independently.
- Transition preparation and planning needs to be informed by an assessment of need and embedded in the child's care planning from an early age
- Pathway Plans need to be clearer about what we expect of the young person to work towards, how and who will work with them, what do we expect them to do and how will we know that this has been achieved.

#### **4.4 Consultation with our foster carers:**

- Our foster carers told us that they were not aware of the Catch 22 GRAL workbook and was not talked about in care planning meetings.

- They would welcome more structured support and training in helping children and young people develop life and independence living skills.

#### 4.5 Consultation with young people: (appendix 1)

- Young people in foster care said that some given chores such as 'pegging out the washing', 'hoovering', others said their foster family had really prepared them, they could 'cook meals', do their laundry and was able to manage their finances.
- In relation to direct work that could be undertaken with them by a range of professionals to develop their independent skills only a small number of young people could talk about the use of different resources
- Some young people told us that they had participated in workshops when they lived in semi independence accommodation.
- Most young people told us that they had done a lot of the preparation themselves.
- Their awareness of the Catch 22 resource Get Ready for Adult workbook was variable, some responded 'not heard of it.' Some said 'it sounded familiar' but went on to say they did not know what it was and many said 'no'.

#### 4.6 Actions

2. Workshops are scheduled with practitioners to ensure that when developing pathway plans with young people pull on the support of key partners. We evidence the skills the young person has, the preparation work we need to focus on, specifying how, who and when this work is undertaken with the young person and their carers.

##### **Timescales for completion: January 2021**

3. Task and Finish Group will be established in January 2021 to review our practice and approach to preparing young people for living independently and develop a structured toolkit and associated training for practitioners and carers. This will include the delivery of group based workshops with young people. Young people will be supported in building portfolio of achievement and attain certificate which evidences that they are tenancy ready.

##### **Timescales for completion: April 2021**

4. We need to review the support and interventions provided to our care experienced young parents. The feedback from young people and our findings has prompted the need for a focused audit in respect of our care experienced young parents and parents to be. This audit is underway.

##### **Timescales for completion: February 2021**

#### Example ASDAN

ASDAN was originally developed to support the Government's 'Keep on Caring: Supporting young people from care to independence' strategy. It's reported that the course has been well received in the authorities which are using the materials with young people. ASDAN is a curriculum development and awarding organisation and developed the 'Living Independently Short Course' with assistance and expert input from Bristol City and North Somerset leaving care services.

This is a 60 hour course and has 9 modules which cover:

- Earning and spending money
- Keeping track of your money
- Making financial choices
- A place of your own
- Health and wellbeing
- Cooking on a budget
- Practical cooking skills
- Career management
- Preparing for the world of work

#### 4.7 Training flats:

Our care leavers say that they want to leave care so that they can get their 'own place'. The reality of living alone as the first move after leaving care can be very different from what young people expect. Many local authorities are using training flats to help care leavers experience what it is really like to live on their own, without the risk of them losing their own first tenancy.

#### Recommendation 1

Scope the cost and development of a training flat and a report is presented to the Directorate Management Group for consideration.

**Timescales for completion: February 2021**

#### 5.0 Supporting care leavers to move into settled accommodation as they leave care or custody.

There was significant learning in reviewing how well we support young people to move into settled accommodation as they leave in care. The Audits and consultation with young people, carers and practitioners considered the following.

- Was there an understanding of the housing options available to them?
- How do practitioners and young people experience the application process for settled accommodation?
- Are our young people prioritised for housing ?
- How well do we plan for young people leaving custody ?
- How can we improve the offer for our young people ?



**5.1 Where young people, foster carers and practitioners aware of the range of housing options available to them?**

1. The Audits identified that for most young people their personal advisors, sometimes in conjunction with housing officers would talk through the options available to them. However, the range of options for some young people narrowed due to eligibility or specificity about their choice of the area or because options had been exhausted or where it was felt that the young person was at yet ready to manage a tenancy.
2. For young people who are late entrants to care or have experienced several moves in care or have been in custody there was clear evidence that their options to secure housing accommodation is compromised because we have not been able to secure sufficient stability to work with them to develop their independence skills.
3. The impact of several moves has meant that despite considerable effort by social workers and personal advisors the window of opportunity to work meaningfully before they are young adults is not sufficiently consistent.
4. Four young people in this cohort are living in long term temporary accommodation, and some having exhausted options in Walsall, including Rivers House and are living in long term temporary accommodation outside the Borough. (St Basils or YMCA).
5. 2 of our young people in this cohort had either been evicted or subject to eviction notices whilst being placed at Rivers House. A further young person remains at Rivers House and is making good progress.

**5.2 Consultation with young people ( appendix 1) and foster carers:**

- Young people reported that their understanding of the range of housing options and the choice that they are able to exercise is variable.
- Some young people had limited options and choice and this was not always explained to them.
- Foster carers did not feel that they had an understanding of the range of options and felt that young people have limited choice.

**5.3 Consultation with practitioners:**

- There is an over reliance on personal advisors and housing officers to hold and impart information about housing options.
- Information on our website needs to be updated and more accessible.
- We need to be able to explain when we are not able to meet preferences and choice.

**5.4 Learning**

- We need to provide young people, carers and practitioners with information about their housing options in a simple and accessible manner

- We need to ensure that social workers and foster carers equally understand the range of housing options available in Walsall.
- We must ensure that we have exhausted all avenues of support jointly to avoid the risk of eviction and we review our escalation process as part of the review of the housing protocol.

## 5.5 Actions

5. We will jointly develop the information about the range of housing options in an easily accessible format and will be set out in our Local Offer and.

**Timescales for completion: March 2021**

6. Joint workshops with colleagues from housing will be held to educate our social workers and foster carers about the range of housing options available.

**Timescales for completion: February 2021**

- 5.6 Young people in temporary accommodation are often placed either in a crisis or because they are not yet ready to manage their own tenancy. Having a fall back option if things go wrong is a reassurance for care leavers and offering this to care leavers reduces the pressure on them, and is part of being a good corporate parent. This offers is the space to engage care leavers to work with us to resolve their situation and offer 'second and third chances'. Eviction should therefore should be the last resort and requires the need to for us to jointly harness all of our collective resources to avoid this.

### Recommendation 2

The decision to evict a care leaver from local authority housing accommodation will only be made by the Director of Customer Engagement (or a delegated substitute) following consultation with the Director of Children's Social Work. Whenever safe, and practical to do so, these Directors, will jointly develop a plan with the aim of preventing the eviction from occurring..

- 5.7 **How do practitioners and young people experience the application process for settled accommodation?**

## 5.8 Audits found:

1. Personal advisors support the young person in making their application for housing and this can vary depending on their age or whether their need could be met by "general needs" or through WHG Young People's Scheme.
2. All care leavers have a priority status but their "Gold Banding" is secured at the age of 18 years and agreed by the housing providers. Care leavers who later request a move though their social housing landlord do not always retain their priority status.

3. The audit found that not all young people required a housing assessment or a Personalised Housing Plan but where that assessment was undertaken and personalised housing plans were developed these were held on housing records only. It was also difficult to evidence how or whether personal advisors had contributed to Personalised Housing Plans and these did not inform the young person's Pathway Plan. Similarly it was not always evident whether the Pathway Plan had been shared with housing officers..
4. Housing electronic systems do not flag care leavers on to their systems at first sight and we were unable to determine if this is impacted on their responsiveness to direct contact from a care leaver. Conversely the audit identified that some housing officers have access to Children's Services Mosaic records which provides access to care history of the young person and this is not proportionate.
5. Auditors saw positive relationships and good joint working between allocated housing officers and personal advisors with young people and much of this evidenced on case notes via emails and phone calls and in face to face meetings with young people. Whilst, records across both housing and social care records evidenced good communication between personal advisors and housing officers, it was not always clear what actions had been agreed/taken or the 'reasonable steps' housing officers, personal advisors and young people would need to take to secure accommodation. Where transition planning meetings were held they did not always include housing officers, though there was evidence of both the housing officers and personal advisors meeting jointly with young people.
6. We found that it was not always clear when the legal "Duty to Refer" had been initiated as much of the communication in these circumstances was through direct contact or emails with the housing officers. The "Duty to Refer" portal was not always used. There was evidence of personal advisors / managers advocating or challenging decisions on behalf of young people but this not always done so on the basis of the Housing Assessment.
7. The audit also identified a number of young people who were parents who in the main had been able to secure appropriate housing and as their circumstances changed were seeking move to either a larger properties as their family had grown or were in private tenancies who wanted to move into social housing as this provide them greater security. We found that they have allocated housing officers who were progressing these requests.
8. Young people who were residing in the WHG Young Person's Scheme commissioned by Children's Services did not have an allocated Housing Officer and we found that this has led to delay in the "flipping" the tenancy and us The process to address this is currently underway.
9. Auditors found that support from personal advisors over the last 6 months has been regular with a clear emphasis on emotional well-being and practical support. There was good evidence of communication and liaison with the young person's support network.

10. Auditors found that where young people who were in a joint tenancy the support was not always tailored to the individual needs of the young person to ensure that their tenancies are not compromised due to the actions of the other person and reduce the risk of tenancy breakdown.
11. We found that planning for young people leaving custody and meeting their accommodation needs lead to some young people living in temporary accommodation and secured to close to their release date and this compromised our support for them.

Young people leaving custody are particularly at risk of living in unsuitable accommodation or becoming homeless, and have often experienced poor accommodation or placements before their experience in custody. They may have additional challenges in accessing housing and the support to meet their needs. Planning for young people on short custodial sentences can be challenging, and young people often don't know where they are going to live until the last minute before they leave custody. This can be very unsettling for young people as well as leading to additional problems after they are released

## 5.9 Consultation with young people ( Appendix 1)

- Some young people were happy with their accommodation and felt supported from their personal advisors, social workers and housing officer.
- Some young people told us that their experience good preparation and he understood that what his options are and what is likely/unlikely to be available to him.
- Some young people told us that they were offered no or limited options in Walsall.
- Young people did not always know who their Housing Officer or aware of personalised housing plans.
- Some young people did not feel safe and told us that they did not feel that they were helped to move or apply for alternative accommodation.
- Managing money was an issue raised with some young people when speaking about budgeting and their finances and wanted more help. 'Nobody paid my first month's rent that put me in debt' which may resonate with many more young people who are trying to maintain their tenancy whilst being in first time employment.
- Young people who were spoken to, most were very clear that they wanted to live independently despite not having all the skills to equip them.
- Young people spoke very positively about the support from their personal advisors and were confident about contacting them when they need help. They said that their personal advisors were responsive.

- When discussing if young people had ever been faced with homelessness the young people spoken to have not found themselves in this situation however felt confident enough to get support from their PA if this did happen.

**5.10 Consultation with practitioners which included social workers, personal advisors, 2 housing officers and resettlement officer from Probation. Practitioners told us:**

- Personal advisors and social workers reported that they had positive working relationships with colleagues in housing and that communication was improving between the two services.
- Applications for housing can be made directly to Housing officers or via the Duty to Refer portal. These can then be dealt with by one of three teams in Money Home Job depending on the circumstances of the young person, the General Needs Team or the Young Person's Team or the Rapid Rehousing Team. Practitioners told us that this leads to confusion, a variable response and conflicting communication.
- Practitioners sought clarification of whether Housing systems flagged care leavers much in the same way as they are in other agencies e.g DWP or HMP which leads to a response that is tailored to the needs of care leavers.
- Young people leaving custody are generally dealt with by the Rapid Rehousing Team rather than the Young Person's Team and this leads to a disjointed planning and communication. Some young people have been released from custody without a housing option in place.
- Practitioners told us that when working with other local authorities housing nomination and referral documentation is streamlined with a single pathway for care leavers.
- The general consensus was for a more streamlined approach using one referral form and one doorway for care leavers.
- They would like the Gold Banding to be allocated earlier by our registered social landlords to enable young people to bid and move into their properties before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- Practitioners reported that there is disparity in some care leavers being provided with white goods and others not. This impacts on the use of the Setting Up Home Grant for some young people.
- Practitioners suggested the availability of "training flat" which could support better preparation for young people providing them with an opportunity to experience living independently before doing so.
- Practitioners were positive about the Children's Services WHG Young Person's Scheme but noted that these young people were disadvantaged by not having an allocated Housing Officer leading to delays in tenancies transferring to them when they are 18 years old.

- Practitioners wanted to have a clear escalation process which supports young people to exercise their rights of appeal.

#### 5.11 Learning:

- We would like to see care leavers being awarded Gold banding prior to their 18th birthday and from their 17<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- Establish a clear streamline process for young people to be referred to Housing by their 17<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- Ensure that children's services staff understand how to exercise the "legal duty to refer" and use the Duty to Refer portal so that timescales and decisions can be effectively tracked by managers in Housing and Children's Services.
- It is good practice to contribute to Housing Assessments, Personalised Housing and Pathway Plans and that these are shared with respective services with the consent of the young person based on their housing need. The Housing Assessment and Personalised Housing Plan can then be added to the young person's record
- We need to review the access to children's records is proportionate to enable Housing colleagues to identify the young person's basic details and service / personal advisor involvement.
- Personal advisors to be involved and contribute to Personalised Housing Plans and equally we need to see the contribution of Housing Officers reflected in Pathway Plans, and that these plans are shared with housing officers and personal advisors with the consent of the young person.
- Explore with Social Housing Landlords the possibility of awarding care leavers Gold Banding prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- Review the pathway for young people leaving custody with Money Home Job, Probation and Children's Services.

#### 5.12 Actions

7. To jointly review and simplify the nomination and referral documentation for care leavers, ensuring that the language used is more reflective of the needs of care leavers, including how the Duty to Refer operates in Walsall when a care leaver is threatened with homelessness.
8. Review and streamline the processes in the WHG Young Person's Scheme to ensure that young people are not disadvantaged.



9. Review the access to Children's Services records to ensure that this is proportionate and further information is requested on the basis of an agreed protocol.

10. **Care Leavers Leaving Custody** – Jointly review and revise how Money Home Job, Children's Service, National Probation Service and the Youth Offending Services work together to support the release of young people from custody ensuring that there is appropriate pre-release planning in place. This will include the need to ensure accommodation needs are identified early, and actions taken to ensure care leavers do not leave custody without an accommodation plan in place.

11. Children's Services to work with the Housing and Welfare Service to consider how a single pathway for care leavers can be developed in Walsall.

**Timescales for completion: March 2021**

#### 5.14 **Gold Banding:**

In order to enable young people to secure Gold Banding in advance of their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday registered social landlords will require the local authority to act as rent grantors to enable young people to bid and move into their properties before their 18th birthday.

#### **Recommendation 3**

The Board asks Walsall Council develops a rent guarantor scheme with Registered Social Landlord/s in Walsall and a report is presented to the Directorate Management Group for consideration.

**Timescales for completion: March 2021**

5.15 We want to ensure that our young people get the best start and avoid getting into debt. The Council currently provides a 100% Council Tax exemption to provide immediate financial assistance and helps reduce the risk of debt.

We would ask the Children's Services and the Council's Revenues and Benefits Service to improve the offer to young people leaving care with the expense of setting up and managing their home.

This could include the provision of a package of furniture and essential domestic appliances which then allows the young person's £2000 setting up home grant to go much further.

#### **Recommendation 4**

Local Authority meets the first month's rent for young people to reduce the risk of young people entering debt

#### **Recommendation 5**

The Board asks the Housing and Welfare Team to explore the costs associated with improving the offer to young people leaving care to help support them with the expense of setting up and managing their home. A business plan will be developed, and taken to Cabinet, to seek approval



for any additional funds that may be required to support the development of this scheme.

**Timescales for completion: March 2021**

#### **6.0 Additional Support**

- 6.1 Most young people who had secured housing accommodation were able to access tenancy support from the Housing provider, their allocated housing officer and personal advisor. For many young parents their support network included health professionals and sometimes social workers from adult services or children's services.
- 6.2 Young people living in supported living or accommodation or in the Young People's Scheme have tailored support which can range from between 5 hours a week to up 24 hours based on the assessed needs of the young person and will gradually reduce as the young person's is able to live independently. This can be extended post 18 based on the young person's needs is either secured from the provider or is spot purchased. It was also evident that for some young people there was a need for more tailored and intensive tenancy support to avoided the need for them to experience further moves. For many young people additional day to day support.
- 6.3 The service has recognised that we needed to develop targeted support and have utilised short term grant funding to establish 2 part time posts to deliver more targeted support to young people at risk of homelessness and asylum seeking care leavers using the Rough Sleepers Grant and Migration Fund.
- 6.4 In March 2020, we appointed a part time support worker to work with vulnerable young people at risk of homelessness who is currently working with 12 young people aged from 17 years and above. The funding has also been utilised to secure 0.5 personal advisor capacity in the service. The service also engages with the Council's Rough Sleepers Team to secure housing options and other support.
- 6.5 In 2019, we also appointed a part time support worker utilising funding from the Migration Fund to support care leavers who were previously Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers with specific focus on targeted support focussing on helping them to navigate the immigration systems, support in accessing mental health support and reducing isolation and targeted work to prepare young people should they exhaust all appeal rights.
- 6.6 The service also access to fulltime Impact worker as well as Careers Advisor located in the Virtual School to work directly with young people to secure work or training. The pandemic has had a significant impact on young people in education and employment on many of our young people.

#### **7.0 Joint Housing and Children's Protocol for Care Leavers**

The joint housing protocol was developed and agreed by the Executive Directors of Children's Services and Resources and Transformation in 2018. It aims to ensure that we were working effectively, complying with the legislation and to ensure that we were anticipating the vulnerabilities, young people have the levels of support they require and reducing the risk of tenancy failure or homelessness.

The housing protocol will be revised on the basis of the actions and recommendations outlined above, best practice from other local authorities and the new guidance for councils to help ensure care leavers have the stable homes they need and prevent them from becoming homeless.

This guidance was published in October 2020 by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/action-to-help-prevent-vulnerable-young-people-from-becoming-homeless>.

- 7.1 We would like to work towards removing 'intentionality' from the housing protocol so that no young person is being deemed to have made themselves 'intentionally' homeless and therefore without support from housing going forward.

We would like to involve our registered social landlords to be included in the protocol.

**Timescales for completion: April 2021**

## 8.0 Summary of Recommendation's and Actions:

The recommendations and actions set out below contribute to the Local Offer to young people who are leaving care and those who have left care. These actions will also be informed by the second report of the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leaver's published in November 2020.

- 8.1 The Board is asked to consider the following recommendations

### **Recommendation 1**

Scope the cost and development of a training flat and a report is presented to the Directorate Management Group for consideration.

**Timescales for completion: February 2021**

### **Recommendation 2**

The decision to evict a care leaver from local authority housing accommodation will only be made by the Director of Customer Engagement (or a delegated substitute) following consultation with the Director of Children's Social Work. Whenever safe, and practical to do so, these Directors will jointly develop a plan, with the aim of preventing the eviction from occurring.

### **Recommendation 3**

The Board asks Walsall Council to develop a rent guarantor scheme with Registered Social Landlord/s in Walsall and a report is presented to the Directorate Management Group for consideration.

**Timescales for completion: March 2021**

### **Recommendation 4**

Local Authority meets the first month's rent for young people to reduce the risk of young people entering debt and a report is presented to the Directorate Management Group for consideration.

**Timescales for completion: February 2021**

### **Recommendation 5**

The Board asks the Housing and Welfare Team to explore the costs associated with improving the offer to young people leaving care to help support them with the expense of setting up and managing their home. A business plan will be developed, and taken to Cabinet, to seek approval for any additional funds that may be required to support the development of this scheme.

**Timescales for completion: March 2021****Recommendation 6**

We propose the Councillors as Corporate Parents visit the range of accommodation options we provide for our children leaving care and care leavers.

**8.2 Summary of Actions**

1. Review of Walsall's Staying Put practice guidance and process. This will be undertaken in consultation with the young people, their foster carers and practitioners.

**Timescales for completion: April 2021**

2. Workshops are scheduled with practitioners to ensure that when developing pathway plans with young people pull on the support of key partners. We evidence the skills the young person has, the preparation work we need to focus on, specifying how, who and when this work is undertaken with the young person and their carers.

**Timescales for completion: January 2021**

3. Task and Finish Group will be established in January 2021 to review our practice and approach to preparing young people for living independently and develop a structured toolkit and associated training for practitioners and carers. This will include the delivery of group based workshops with young people. Young people will be supported in building portfolio of achievement and attain certificate which evidences that they are tenancy ready.

**Timescales for completion: April 2021**

4. We need to review the support and interventions provided to our care experienced young parents. The feedback from young people and our findings has prompted the need for a focused audit in respect of our care experienced young parents and parents to be. This audit is underway.

**Timescales for completion: February 2021**

5. We will jointly develop the information about the range of housing options in an easily accessible format and will be set out in our Local Offer.

**Timescales for completion: March 2021**

6. Joint workshops with colleagues from housing will be held to educate our social workers and foster carers about the range of housing options available.

**Timescales for completion: February 2021**

7. To jointly review and simplify the nomination and referral documentation for care leavers, ensuring that the language used is more reflective of the needs of care leavers, including how the Duty to Refer operates in Walsall when a care leaver is threatened with homelessness.
8. Review and streamline the processes in the WHG Young Person's Scheme to ensure that young people are not disadvantaged.
9. Review the access to Children's Services records to ensure that this is proportionate and further information is requested on the basis of an agreed protocol.
10. Care Leavers Leaving Custody – Jointly review and revise how Money Home Job, Children's Service, National Probation Service and the Youth Offending Services work together to support the release of young people from custody ensuring that there is appropriate pre-release planning in place. This will include the need to ensure accommodation needs are identified early, and actions taken to ensure care leavers do not leave custody without an accommodation plan in place.
11. Housing and Welfare Services to work with Children's Services to consider how a single pathway for care leavers can be developed in Walsall.

**Timescales for completion: March 2021**

12. Revised Joint Housing and Children's Services Housing Protocol

**Timescales for completion: April 2021**

## **Appendix 1 – Consultation with Young People**

### **The Housing Consultation of young people**

This report will look at the findings from consultation of young people around the support they received around housing when entering into independence.

Young people were spoken to individually by the Children's Champion supported by two child and family support workers giving them the opportunity to speak confidentially about their own experience of the support they received in terms of their housing and the service. Young people were very open about the level of support they received and the responses varied in different areas.

### **Preparation for living independently**

Many of our young people had different journeys into independence, some came from foster care who wanted to be independent or where their placement broke down and no offer of stay and put and some from residential homes.

When looking at how well young people were prepared to develop skills to live independently the young people spoken to who had the stability of long term foster care gave a mixed response. Some said they were given chores such as 'pegging out the washing', 'hoovering', others said their foster family had really prepared them, they could 'cook meals', do their laundry and was able to manage their finances.

When looking at how young people were taught to develop their independent skills to establish if any direct work was undertaken by professionals who supported them with different resources, very few said there was any direct work undertaken from the professionals. Some mentioned there were occasional workshops for those who lived in semi independence accommodation but most said they had done a lot of the preparation themselves.

When asked if they knew about the Catch 22 resource Get Ready for Adult life designed specifically for Children and Young people in care or leaving care, very few young people knew about this resource, some responded 'not heard of it.' Some said 'it sounded familiar' but went on to say they did not know what it was and many said 'no'

### **Housing Options and Support.**

As young people entered into independence the ones that were spoken to around their housing options, from the responses given, did not seem to have been given much of a choice when they spoke to by their PA's SW or housing officer. Not all young people spoke about different types of accommodation.

Some young people said 'Before I moved in the flat I was not given much option' 'I accepted the flat without viewing it' When the young person was asked how they felt about this the young person said she 'I was ok with this as it was a new build' One response from a young person went on to say 'I think the support around housing as failed, they put to many young people in the same area with problems'.

Another young person had a totally different experience saying in preparation for independence was very detailed in telling him what his options are and what is likely/unlikely to be available to him, compared to another young person who said '***I wasn't given options I was just told I was moving here***'

When asked about the level of intervention they had received from their Housing Officer this appeared limited. Some did not know who their officer was, some young people did not seem to know what a personalised housing plan was and said 'if this was discussed they could not remember'. A few said they were in private rented accommodation and did not read their agreements.

Although some young people were happy with their accommodation and felt supported from their PA's and Social worker and housing officer, some said they did not feel safe where they were living.

A young person whose foster placement had broken down and was sofa surfing with relatives which resulted in double eviction is now residing in private accommodation said 'I don't feel safe, the front door is like a bedroom door.' Another young person went on to say 'I lived by a person who did nasty things to me as a child, no one helped me to move despite me telling' The young person has now moved in what she considers a safe area, having asked for help which she reported was not good however was able to do her own housing application for her current property.

Employment and paying rent was also an issue raised with some young people when speaking about budgeting and their finances. Young people didn't feel they were supported very well around this area as the reality of having their own accommodation and managing their bills at an early age was difficult.

Although not every young person living independently was spoken to a young person spoke about getting into debt in the early part of their tenancy and not having support 'Nobody paid my first month's rent that put me in debt' which may resonate with many more young people who are trying to maintain their tenancy whilst being in first time employment.

Young people who were spoken to, most were very clear that they wanted to live independently despite not having all the skills to equip them. Young people spoke very positively about the support from their PA's whilst it was not always clear from the information received. Most young people felt confident to contact their PA's when they need help and reported most PA's got back to them if they was not available when young people tried to make contact. When discussing if young people had ever been faced with homelessness the young people spoken to have not found themselves in this situation however felt confident enough to get support from their PA if this did happen.

### **What have we done well:**



The young people spoken to reported a mixed response of their experience of what the service did well for to support them. As a whole young people said their PA's were helpful. One young person said he couldn't say enough at how well he was supported from his PA and felt equipped for independence.

What some young people spoken to said ***'As soon as I said I wanted to move, my PA was on it straight away, they did most of the work for me, filled out application form, rang everyone for me and I can text them daily'***  
***'Always gives us a choice if we need help, Always there when we need them'***  
***'Learnt me how to budget'***  
***'Always someone you can contact'***  
***'Residential staff was kind and caring'***  
***'Not sure'***  
***'Nothing'***  
***'Helping me'***  
***'WHG Helped with the decorating'***  
***'Paid for a holiday in Malaga'***  
***'Made no effort to build a relationship with me'***

#### **What did we not do well and could have been done better.**

##### **What young people said**

***'Let's a lot of young people down, gives us false hopes, make promises that never happen everything is a shamble' We want you to be honest with us'***

***'As soon as we made a mistake we were moved on we should be able to have more chances from the services given our history of care.'***

***' Could have helped me with money management, when I was in care I didn't need to buy food shopping, didn't know about rent, we expect it all to be given to us'***

***The service could have prepared us at an early age so it did not come as a shock when we was leaving care.***

***'Workers telling us they are over worked, we just want to be cared for'***

***'Would like more visits to check they are ok and they have food in the cupboard and the transition period from SW to PA could be extended until we are well established'***

***'When we present as being well, we are left alone, my worker hardly came and visited me, I always came to her. More home visits to ensure we are coping'.***

The young people who participated in the consultation was mainly living independently, therefore received support only from their PA's. The young people in stay and put and semi-independent continue to receive support into full independence from their carers and staff.

#### **What can we do better**

The findings highlighted that young people received inconsistent levels of support. Whilst some young people did not want any support and felt equipped for independence and wanted to be left alone. This was not the case for others.

Whilst some of these resources listed below are available to young people this is what some young people spoken to suggest would help them now they are living independently which highlights inconsistent levels of support.

- Parenting Groups Mother and Baby Groups '***Once I had the children I felt so isolated***'
- Someone to talk to, '***if I have a problem they can help me fix it***'.
- Workshops to help manage finances, using different scenarios and resources around budgeting
- Support with moving
- Independent living skills '***I didn't feel ready for independence***'
- Basic DIY skills
- More home visits '***It can be very lonely living on your home***
- 'More consistency from my PA'

**Michelle Cummings**  
**Children's Champion**

## Corporate Parenting Board Work Programme 2020/21

Lead Officer	Board date	11 <sup>th</sup> January	15 <sup>th</sup> February 2021	22 <sup>nd</sup> March 2021
	<i>Report to AD</i>	<i>14<sup>th</sup> December 2020</i>	<i>21<sup>st</sup> January 2021</i>	<i>1<sup>st</sup> March 2021</i>
	<i>Slides to Young People</i>			
	<i>Report to Democratic Services</i>	<i>30<sup>TH</sup> December 2020</i>	<i>4<sup>th</sup> February 2021</i>	<i>11<sup>TH</sup> March 2021</i>
<b>Michelle Cummings</b>	<b>Young People Engagement</b>			
<b>Alison Jones</b>	<b>Health Passports</b>			
<b>Zoe Morgan</b>	<b>Local Offer</b>			
<b>Jivan Sembi</b>	<b>Housing Report</b>			
<b>Mark Tobin Adoption @Heart</b>	<b>Regional Adoption Agency</b>			
<b>Mark Burrows</b>	<b>Fostering Annual report</b>			
<b>Helena Kucharczyk.</b>	<b>Performance Monitoring</b>		Q3	
<b>Lorraine Thompson</b>	<b>NEET</b>			
<b>Alison Jones And TBC</b>	<b>CAMHS and emotional wellbeing of Children in Care and Care Leavers</b>			
<b>Lorraine Thompson</b>	<b>Assurance report – virtual school</b>			
<b>Alison Jones</b>	<b>Assurance report –CCG</b>			

