

LOCAL OFFER FOR CARE LEAVERS

To: **Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee**

Meeting Date: **20 November 2019**

From: **Kate Knight
Lead Corporate Parenting Manager**

Electoral division(s): **All**

Purpose: **To update the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee on the implementation of the Local Offer for Care Leavers. This was developed to respond to changes to Leaving Care Services arising from the Children and Social Work Act 2017, including the newly articulated ‘Corporate Parenting Principles’, the extension of Personal Adviser support to all under-25 year olds with Care Leaving status and specifically the requirement to develop a ‘local offer’ for care leavers.**

Recommendation: **The Sub-Committee is recommended to:**

- a) note the implementation and development of Cambridgeshire’s Local Offer to Care Leavers and support awareness and implementation of the offer within and with the partners of the Council;**
- b) consider how Elected Members might wish to be involved and/or champion the offer for Cambridgeshire’s care leavers;**
- c) Encourage partners to continue to engage with the development and implementation of Cambridgeshire’s Local Offer to Care Leavers.**

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Summary:

The aim of this new duty is to protect care leavers aged 21 to 25 from feeling isolated, not having anybody to turn to for advice or support or continuing to struggle with the move to adult life. Local Authorities are Corporate Parents to care leavers up to the age of 25 and should support them in a way which is in line with the way birth parents support their own children as they grow up, helping them move towards an independent life.

We have redesigned our care leaving teams as a dedicated service for care leavers. We have created a service focusing on supporting our children in care to become successful adults. To support this we now have four personal advisors attached to the children in care teams, to work just on supporting the young person with their independent passport and all actions requiring this specialist service. We have developed two strong care leaving teams based in the North and the South of the County and we have increased our personal advisor capacity so that we can meet the requirements of our extended duties to deliver a service to all qualifying young people with Care Leaving status up until the age of 25 years. We have also increased our social work capacity in the teams in order to develop a clear review process of the pathway plans for all our care leavers. We have developed a specialist training pathway for our staff and we are focusing on transition planning and improving the quality of our pathway plans.

In accordance with legislation we have developed and published Cambridgeshire's 'Local Offer' and we are working hard to develop this. Cambridgeshire's Local Offer is designed to provide all the information a young adult with Care Leaver status might need in one easily accessible place. The website Pathways4US can be found at:

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/children-s-social-care/care-leavers-local-offer/>

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Legislation including the Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004 has successively strengthened the responsibility of public bodies to children in care and young adults with Care Leaver status. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 further improves support for looked after children and strengthens the duty and responsibility of all Local Authorities, including District Councils and organisations providing support and services for children and young people.
- 1.2 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 states that Councils and partner organisations must have regard to a set of Corporate Parenting Principles when exercising their functions. This applies to the whole Council and not just to children's services and to all Care Leavers up to the age of 25 years. This legislation also applies to officers and Members alike. While the offer has extended the duties, the emphasis is on supporting young person to make a successful transition to adulthood. This can be directly or by helping the young person build a positive social network around them. This involves ensuring these young people are connected and stable in their community. In order to achieve this each young person needs to live in stable and suitable

accommodation, be able to access education, employment and or training and feel secure in their identity and emotional wellbeing. The personal advisors job is to coordinate the support the young person needs, until they can manage this themselves. We expect with the young person's growing maturity and independence that the support they will need will reduce over time.

- 1.3 Cambridgeshire's Local Offer is based on a needs led assessment with the young person and this varies according to their age.
- 1.4 For care leavers between the age of 16 and 17 the local authority is under an absolute duty to accommodate them, as well as providing them with a personal advisor.
- 1.5 For care leavers aged 18 to 20, there is a proactive duty on the local authority to keep in touch with care leavers (section 23 C (2) of the Children 1989 Act), which does not apply to care leavers aged 21 or over (neither those who are already entitled to support because they are in education or training, nor those who will be covered by the new duty).
- 1.6 For care leavers aged 21 or over, the duties in the Children Act 1989 introduced through the Children and Social Work Act – to assess care leavers' needs, and develop and keep under review a pathway plan – applies only where the young person requests support.
- 1.7 Therefore, the new duty does not necessarily mean that the local authority needs to provide the same level of support to care leavers aged 21 to 25 as it does those aged 18 to 20. The new duty does however, enable local authorities to respond positively to requests from care leavers aged 21 to 25 who may continue to be struggling with adult life.
- 1.8 Cambridgeshire currently supports 350 young adults with Care Leaver status. At the time of writing we have 769 Children in Care. Since offering our extended duties we have had a mixture of young people accessing support for a variety of needs. This has included help with accessing higher education, housing, mental health and financial worries. We have assessed each need on an individual basis and offered support and advice as appropriate. When a young person reaches the age of 21 and if they are not in Higher Education, their personal advisor will discuss with them whether they wish to continue to receive support post 21. Where they do not want support their pathway plan will be updated to reflect their current needs. If they do want a service they can request this up and to the age of 25.

2. MAIN ISSUES

2.1 Corporate Parenting Principles

We are looking for a whole system change which would fully embed the Corporate Parenting Principles. We see the Local Offer as 'part of the day job'. All staff within the Corporate Parenting Service should be aware of the Offer and what it entails and how they can support young people to access it.

We are aware, that many care experienced children, can see their 18th birthday as a difficult time. Our young people have told us that they do not feel prepared to leave care and are often not given the right information or advice in order to support this transition. Young people have little faith in their pathway plans and often can't see the point in them. The personal advisor role attached to the children in care teams has been specially designed to avoid this fear and experience. The social work posts in the leaving care teams have been specially designed to support this transition and ensure that pathway plans are continually reviewed and relevant post 18.

Our aim is to fully support and prepare our children in care so that they are able to manage appropriate transitions successfully. We start independence and transition planning at 14 years old. These steps should be based around education or training choices and options. So for example, if we have children living out of county in residential settings under 16, we should be actively supporting them to come back in county for education, employment or training options in year 12. This means supporting them to attend local open evenings for sixth form or college or applying for apprenticeships in year 10 and 11. We then need to link their accommodation options which will support them accessing these choices. We want young people to be well prepared and in control of their care plans. Cambridge Housing Association and Break, Staying Close Staying Connected, offer outreach support for young people who will be moving to them in the future.

If young people are settled in foster care we want to inform them of their options post 16, including staying put and ensuring that they have the right information in order to make informed choices. Their pathway plans need to be up to date and reflective of young people's plans and options. We are aiming for smooth transitions into the leaving care teams when the time is right for the young person. Where young people are struggling, they will have access to our specialist personal advisors, to help them access further support and advice.

We intend to influence local authority culture so that all staff and departments within it consider the impact of their work for children and young people for whom the local authority is a Corporate Parent. We want to spread the message, that aspiring for and investing in these young people now will create independent and successful citizens for Cambridgeshire in the future.

The Principles state that local authorities (including county, district, borough and combined authorities) must 'have regard to the need' to take certain actions in their work for children in care and care leavers.

These are:

- To act in their best interests and promote their physical and mental health and well-being
- To encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings
- To take into account their views, wishes and feelings
- To help them gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners

- To promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for them
- For them to be safe and have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work
- To prepare them for adulthood and independent living.

This reinforces the established understanding that Corporate Parenting responsibilities extend beyond the County Council to its statutory partners and the Act seeks to further consolidate this through the formulation of the Council's local offer.

3.0 The Local Offer for Care Leavers

A successful bid was made to the transformation fund in the summer of 2019 and we are delighted to have been awarded the monies for a fixed term 12 month contract for a specialist personal advisor dedicated to the local offer. Joe Gilbert has been in place since the beginning of October and has already started making great strides in this area.

Our ambition for Cambridgeshire County Council is to develop a Kite Mark status to be care aware – this will encourage the Council, its partners and local business to consider our children in care and care leavers at all opportunities. The Offer currently incorporates what we and our current partners offer to care leavers in preparing for adulthood and independent living.

4.0 Developing Cambridgeshire's Local Offer

The Local Offer is designed to provide all the information a young adult with Care Leaver status might need in one easily accessible place and also to link them with relevant opportunities in the community. We have recently put in place a team of three Specialist Personal Advisors to pioneer this, each Specialist PA has their own remit. Philip Turton is focusing on Homelessness Prevention. Rebecca McCallum is focusing on engaging our Care Leavers in Education, Employment and Training and Joe Gilbert is developing relationships with local businesses in the community to provide additional opportunities such as securing workplace opportunities, Care Leaver discounts or sponsorship funding. This aspirational approach is unique to Cambridgeshire County Council and should provide an exciting opportunity to develop a really strong support infrastructure for our young people. In the month since this approach has been adopted we have already managed to secure £3,000 funding to purchase bicycles for our Care Leavers to enable them to access education, employment and training and also agreed large discounts for Care Leavers for furniture costs when setting up their homes.

Over the next year as we develop our Care Leavers offer from its initial foundations to a well-established support network our website will evolve to reflect this, with the latest developments being put on as they happen, keeping our Local Offer current and relevant.

2.4 Education, Employment and Training

We currently have 34% of our 16 to 21 cohort of care leavers who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Of the young people that are NEET 33% (out of the 34% total) are in categories of “not yet ready” and 12% are categorised as NEET due to their self-reported “mental health needs”, in other words 45% of our NEETS are some considerable way from the job market. This is the cohort that we need to focus on getting ready for the job or training market.

Rebecca McCullum, Specialist PA has been working with the Virtual School and a number of programmes to try and support our children in care and care leavers in order to get ready for the education or labour market. She has been working with Beat Learning to develop a brand new training programme based in Cambridge. This will offer a bespoke learner engagement programme, for which our Children in Care and Care Leavers will be prioritised. The recruitment day was held on the 1 November 2019, with the aim to start young people the following week. Beats are also running the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programme in Peterborough. This is well attended by our unaccompanied children. This is an area which will need a significant amount of resource in the future in order to significantly improve our NEET figures for our Children in Care and Care Leavers.

Rebecca attends the County Council Apprenticeship offer meeting and there is a plan to try and develop opportunities for our care leavers within this. This will involve supporting young people getting ready for apprenticeships, work experience, traineeships and possibly apprenticeships (adult care and disabilities). The next meeting is on 11 November 2019. Rebecca has also met with the manager of Nacro training centre in Wisbech in order to support the review of their learning offer for our Children in Care and Care Leavers. She is also leading on the development of the cohort of K9 walk your worries away.

2.5 Education, Training and Employment (ETE) (66% of 16-21 CIC/care leavers)

Further education

Numbers in post 16 further education continue to increase. At the start of the academic year we had a record 66% (of the 66% ETE total) of our Children in Care and Care Leavers studying in either a school sixth form or a Further Education college. Large numbers of these are concentrated at Peterborough Regional College and Cambridge Regional College so continuing to build on the close working relationship with these colleges is essential. Approximately 80 starter stationary packs were distributed to young people semi-independent/independent living prior to starting their educational placements.

2.6 Higher Education

Nine Level 3 learners attended the Care Leaver Pathways to University day with Anglia Ruskin University. The day included sessions on: Why go to university, getting started on your personal statement, support services and a chance to look round on a normal working day.

Six young people started at University this autumn and in a bid to improve retention have been offered a £50 voucher if they supply their personal advisors with their first semester assignment and exam marks. They are also being offered support with any other issues they may have such as student finance, accommodation etc. We have 13 young people already at university and one of these has just started a master's course. One adult from the September's figures has just finished her masters and is applying for work.

2.7 Mentoring Project

We have visited Luton Borough Council to view their mentoring scheme. We have identified ten young people in collaboration with Cambridge Regional College to be mentored under this scheme. The next step is to secure funding for this project.

2.8 Aspiration Audit

The plan is to collate the aspirations of the current year 9 cohort of Children in Care and develop opportunities that enable them to explore these career fields further. This was launched to foster carers at the virtual school foster carers conference.

2.9 Preventing homelessness - Rough Sleeping Strategy

The Specialist Housing Personal Advisor has now been recruited and has been in position for six weeks. Initial scoping has taken place and work has begun on developing the joint housing protocol. The scope of the role is reducing homelessness for our care leaving cohort and reducing the risk of homelessness for our Children in Care and Care Leavers.

The Specialist Housing Personal Advisor is currently working alongside the Children in Care team workers and the leaving care workers to review the transition process to ensure that housing vulnerabilities are identified and addressed when transition plans are being proposed.

The role is also to support, assist and advise on all housing issues while being the point of contact for all local agencies. To coordinate a county wide multi agency approach to homeless prevention and to identify and support all young people who may be at risk of homelessness

The Lead Corporate Parenting Manager is completing a monthly audit of all children who have been subjected to three plus moves. This is to support an evaluation of placement stability throughout the service and to identify children or young people who need additional support either now or in the future.

2.10 Governance

A steering group is being developed which will require members from a wide variety of sectors. This will feed into the corporate parenting governance boards which are also being developed.

3. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Resource Implications – 12 month fixed term contract currently funded by the transformation fund.
- 3.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications NA
None
- 3.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications
None
- 3.4 Equality and Diversity Implications
None
- 3.5 Engagement and Communications Implications
None
- 3.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement
None
- 3.7 Public Health Implications
None

Source Documents	Location
None	None