

Cabinet

16 December 2015



Care Leavers Strategy

Report of Corporate Management Team

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Councillor Ossie Johnson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children & Young People's Services

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to present a Care Leavers Strategy for Durham County Council.

Background

- 2 The National Care Leavers Strategy was launched in October 2013 and sets out the actions that government departments will take in order to improve the support care leavers receive during their transition to adulthood and independence. A 'one year' on progress update to the Care Leavers Strategy was launched by the Department of Education in October 2014. These documents set out clear expectations for local authorities' support for care leavers. In order to summarise how the Council will meet all expectations placed on the local authority, a three year Care Leavers Strategy has been produced and is attached.
- 3 Nationally, outcomes for care leavers are poor compared to their peers. This strategy sets out the Council's ambition and intentions for this very vulnerable group in the following areas;

Physical Health & Mental Health

- 4 Children often enter the care system with a poorer level of physical and mental health than their peers, and their longer-term outcomes remain worse.
- 5 Young people making the transition to adulthood may have continuing health needs that require ongoing treatment. The Department of Education Statutory Guidance – Promoting the health and wellbeing of looked-after children (2015) states that local authorities should ensure that there are effective plans in place to enable looked after children aged 16 to 17 to make a smooth transition to adulthood, and that they are able to continue to obtain the health advice and services they need.

Housing and Staying Put

- 6 Care Leavers are a vulnerable group of young adults who have particular needs in relation to housing and homelessness. Nationally around a quarter of those living on the streets, have a background in care.
- 7 Securing better placement stability and increased choice will enable young people to stay safe. Young people are discouraged from leaving their final placement until they are ready to manage on their own, with ongoing support as required. We aim to secure placement stability through increased placement choice.

Education and Attainment

- 8 There continues to remain a gap between the educational achievements of care leavers and their peers. In 2014, 5% of Durham's former relevant young people were in higher education (6% England average), in comparison to 31% of 'all' young people in Durham in higher education (Department of Business, Innovation and skills).
- 9 Care leavers are less likely to achieve 5 A*-C GCSE's. In 2013, 20% of Durham's children continuously looked after for 12 months achieved 5+ A*-C grades at GCSE and equivalent including English and Maths (15% England average), in comparison to 63.1% of all children in Durham achieving this.
- 10 It is a priority that care leavers receive the support they need from schools, colleges, universities and local authorities to maximise their educational attainment and employment opportunities.

Employment and Training

- 11 Employment and training not only provides the best route out of poverty, it also delivers positive change for individuals and for communities across County Durham. Having a job or accessing appropriate training provides structure, a sense of purpose, progress, achievement, encourages self-confidence and personal responsibility for young people who are Care Leavers.
- 12 As a lower proportion of Care Leavers are participating in education, employment and training, it is essential that they receive additional support to enable to progress through learning and into sustainable employment. Therefore through focused action and support and in partnership with other agencies and Council departments, we will strive to increase the number of care leavers in Durham who are in employment, education and training.

Access to Ongoing Advice and Support

- 13 Care leavers require support and guidance before and after they turn 18. The Department for Education have issued regulations and guidance, 'Transitions to Adulthood' which sets a clear expectation that local authorities continue to stay in touch and support young people when they leave care through pathway planning until the young person reaches 21 and up to 25 if he or she stays in education. As an authority we have signed up to the Care Leavers Charter which is a set of principles that capture the aspirations and needs of young people. The Charter endorses the principle of staying in touch with young people when they are no longer anybody's statutory responsibility.

Financial Assistance

- 14 Having timely financial help is crucial when you do not have the support of family to fall back on. Care leavers find it difficult to navigate services and work out what financial support they are entitled to. As a local authority we are committed to ensuring that care leavers are adequately supported financially in their transition from care to adulthood to enable young people leaving care to have the same opportunities to fulfil their potential as their peers.

Justice System

- 15 We recognise that young adults who have been in care can be particularly vulnerable as they transition into adulthood, particularly if they are in the criminal justice system. They are also a particularly vulnerable group that are at risk of being drawn into crime. Care leavers can also be particularly vulnerable to becoming a victim of crime, including in some cases falling victim to grooming and exploitation online or offline.

Consultation Process

- 16 There has been a broad consultation, involving:
- Children in Care Council
 - Corporate Parenting Panel
 - CMT
 - LSCB
 - Children & Families Partnership
- 17 The final strategy reflects the comments provided during this process.

Recommendation

- 18 Cabinet is asked to:
- Consider and approve the attached 'Care Leavers Strategy'.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – N.A

Staffing – N.A

Risk – N.A

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty - The Care Leavers Strategy highlights how we will provide care leavers with the same opportunities as their peers.

Accommodation - The strategy highlights the range of accommodation available to our care leavers.

Crime and Disorder - N.A

Human Rights - N.A

Consultation - A range of operational teams, services and CSSMT have been consulted within during the development of this strategy. The Young People's Service has consulted with young people about the strategy.

Procurement - N.A

Disability Issues - N.A

Legal Implications - As a local authority we have statutory obligation to provide support services to care leavers. These are reflected in the strategy.