



## Corporate Parenting Panel

**Date**        **Friday 15 December 2017**  
**Time**        **9.30 am**  
**Venue**       **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham**

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### Business

#### Part A

**Items during which the Press and Public are welcome to attend.  
Members of the Public can ask questions with the Chairman's  
agreement.**

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Substitute Members
3. Minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2017 (Pages 3 - 10)
4. Declarations of Interest
5. Number of Looked After Children - Update from Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers
6. Analysis of the rise in Looked After Children numbers - Report and presentation of Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager and Research and Equalities Manager (Pages 11 - 14)
7. Overview of Care Proceedings - Report of Legal Manager, Children, Adults and Health (Pages 15 - 20)
8. Local Government Association Resource Packs for Councillors - Update from Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers
  - a) Corporate Parenting (Pages 21 - 48)
  - b) Support for care leavers (Pages 49 - 72)
9. Children in Care Council - Update from Investing in Children
10. **Development Item:** Rise of Looked After Children numbers
11. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.
12. Any resolution relating to the exclusion of the public during the discussion of items containing exempt information.

## Part B

### **Items during which it is considered the meeting will not be open to the public (consideration of exempt or confidential information)**

13. Regulation 44 visits: summary report (including responsive repairs) - Report of Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers (Pages 73 - 102)
14. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.

### **Helen Lynch**

Head of Legal and Democratic Services

County Hall  
Durham  
7 December 2017

To: **The Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel**

Councillor P Brookes (Chairman)  
Councillor H Smith (Vice-Chair)

Councillors B Bainbridge, H Bennett, J Carr, J Charlton, J Considine, P Crathorne, G Darkes, E Huntington, I Jewell, M McKeon, J Makepeace, O Milburn, C Potts, A Reed, G Richardson, A Savory, E Scott, M Simmons and C Wilson

#### **Co-opted Members**

M Baister  
R Edwards  
W Taylor

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**Contact: Jill Parker**

**Tel: 03000 269 711**

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**Durham County Council**

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 24 November 2017** at **9.30 am**

**Present:**

**Councillor P Brookes in the Chair**

**Panel Members:**

Councillors B Bainbridge, H Bennett, J Carr, J Charlton, P Crathorne, G Darkes, J Grant (substitute member), I Jewell, M McKeon, J Makepeace, C Potts, A Reed, G Richardson, A Savory, E Scott, M Simmons and C Wilson

**Co-opted Members:**

M Baister

**Other Members:**

Councillor O Gunn (Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People's Services)

**Also in attendance:**

Jacqui Doherty (LSCB Business Manager),  
Helen Fergusson (Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers),  
Andrea Fletcher (Solicitor, Children and Adult Services),  
Mark Gurney (Strategic Manager, Child Protection and Disability),  
Phil Hodgson (Head of Education),  
Clive Horton (Deputy Head, Virtual School),  
Selwyn Morgans (Manager, Aycliffe Secure Services),  
Karen Robb (Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence),  
Jac Tyler (Operations Manager, Children and Young People's Services),  
Jayne Watson (Senior Partnership Officer).

The Chair welcomed observers, Tim Pinkney, Deputy Head Teacher of Ferryhill Business and Enterprise College and Jennifer Norman and Catherine Rowland, two of Durham County Council's graduate trainees.

**1. Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Considine, E Huntington, O Milburn, H Smith, and, co-opted member, W Taylor.

Apologies were also received from K Clayton, J Geraghty, A Petty and E Seed.

**2. Substitute Members**

Councillor J Grant substituted for Councillor H Smith.

### **3. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on Friday 20 October 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair. The following matters arising were reported:

- With regard to the refurbishment of contact centres, an item has been placed on the funding section of the members' website which provides information about the project and how to contribute to the costs.
- The Senior Partnership Officer advised that all members should have been contacted regarding Regulation 44 visits and any members that have not been contacted were asked to speak to the Senior Partnership Officer after the meeting.

### **4. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **5. Number of Looked After Children**

Helen Fergusson, Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers reported that the current number of looked after children was 795.

### **6. Establishment of Corporate Parenting Panel Sub Groups for Aycliffe Secure Centre and Virtual School**

The Panel considered a report of the Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers which sought approval for the establishment of two sub-groups of the Corporate Parenting Panel, Aycliffe Secure Centre Sub-Group and the Virtual School Sub-Group. The terms of reference for the sub-groups were detailed in the report (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Senior Partnership Officer informed the Panel that work is ongoing to appoint co-opted members and it was reported that Rhiannon Edwards, Head Teacher of Woodham Burn Community School, had confirmed her appointment as a co-opted member.

In response to a question from Cllr Scott as to how sub-groups are formed, the Chair replied that the process is outlined in the terms of reference which form part of Durham County Council's constitution. Sub-groups must comprise of members of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

#### **Resolved:**

The Panel agreed:

- i. The establishment of two sub-groups of the Corporate Parenting Panel for the Virtual School and Aycliffe Secure Centre
- ii. Terms of reference for each sub-group as set out in paragraphs 7 and 12 of the report

- iii. That membership of the sub groups are taken from the membership of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

## **7. Looked After Children: the Journey into the Looked After System**

The Panel considered a report and presentation of Mark Gurney, Strategic Manager for Child Protection and Disability which explained the journey of children and young people into the looked after system (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

In response to a question from Councillor Makepeace, the Strategic Manager for Child Protection and Disability informed the Panel that the authority has responsibility for care leavers up to the age of 25.

Cllr Richardson observed the significant rise in the number of number of looked after children over the years adding that the ability to manage this increasing workload was testament to the hard work of the staff.

Cllr Reed asked how many young people between the ages of 18 and 25 are currently being supported. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence replied that over 200 care leavers between the ages of 18 and 25 are currently being supported and only 2 or 3 care leavers have chosen not to maintain contact with the service.

Cllr Grant expressed concern at impersonal terminology used during meetings and in publications which may lead to young people feeling like commodities. The Strategic Manager for Child Protection and Disability agreed that this is an issue which should be borne in mind and this terminology should be reflected on.

Cllr Crathorne spoke positively about her recent visit to the MASH centre and asked whether the centre had led to improvements. The Strategic Manager for Child Protection and Disability responded that the MASH centre has provided a valuable pool of information which has not only helped to speed-up the process but it has also been an indicator of unmet need.

In response to a question from Cllr Makepeace, the Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence advised that the service is supporting 11 asylum seekers.

Cllr Gunn praised the work of the MASH centre and indicated that a visit is being arranged in January. All Councillors are being encouraged to attend the visit as part of their corporate parenting role.

### **Resolved:**

The Panel:

- i. Noted the contents of the presentation.
- ii. Commented on the contents of the presentation.
- iii. Indicated if more information is required from the service.

## **8. Independent Reviewing Officer Looked After Children Annual Report 2016/17**

The Panel considered a report and presentation of Jac Tyler, Operations Manager, Children and Young People's Services which provided an overview of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service, Looked After Children and Child Protection Annual Reports for the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017. The Annual Report was attached to the report as Appendix 2 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

Councillor Darkes referred to the main causes for dispute being delays and he asked what causes the delays and whether measures had been put in place to avoid delays in future. The Operations Manager replied that, in relation to delays in progressing care plans, care plans are very closely scrutinised and there are very tight timescales in place. Where timescales are not met, the matter is escalated to a senior officer and a dispute resolution process is initiated. The Operations Manager informed the Panel that delays are often caused by external factors such as those resulting from expert assessments, or, in cases where parents have a learning disability. Some delays have been caused by staffing levels.

Members commented that the figure of 94% of reviews being held within the timescales was an excellent achievement.

### **Resolved:**

The Panel:

- i. Noted the contents of the report;
- ii. Noted the development of processes to identify, escalate and address practice concerns for looked after children and children with a child protection plan;
- iii. Noted the analysis of practice and the identification of areas for improvement required of Children and Young People's Services.

## **9. Durham Local Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2016/17**

The Panel considered a report of Jane Geraghty, the Independent Chair of Durham Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). Jacqui Doherty, LSCB Business Manager, tendered apologies for Jane Geraghty and delivered a powerpoint presentation. The full Durham Local Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report was attached to the report as Appendix 2 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

Councillor Scott acknowledged the importance of education and awareness for parents and carers in relation to the safety of online material and asked how this was promoted. The LSCB Business Manager informed the Panel that a lot of work had been done in relation to this. Information on online safety was available on the website, provided through schools and through the Empowering Young People group.

## **Resolved:**

The Panel:

- i. Noted the content of the report;
- ii. Accepted the LSCB Annual Report for information as an overview of the work undertaken in 2016/17 and priorities for action in 2017/18.

## **10. Children in Care Council (CiCC) Update**

The Chair tendered apologies for Ellie Seed, Senior Project Worker of the Children in Care Council (CiCC). The following update was provided:

- The first contact centre is being refurbished, with plans to improve eight more. Information is now available on the members' website as to how members can contribute to the project to refurbish the contact centres.
- A very successful meeting of the CiCC and the Corporate Parenting Panel had been held and the notes of the meeting were shared with papers for the meeting.
- The CiCC have put a link on their website so that the young people know who the DCC councillors are within each area. IIC have offered training and mentoring for members to help them understand what they can do to support a looked after young person. Those interested in participating were asked to inform the Senior Partnership Officer.
- The CiCC has contributed to the new adoption guide, which is now in use by the adoption team
- Four members of the CiCC delivered workshops at the regional CiCC conference. The workshops were very well received, with 39 people taking part.
- The CiCC are involved in the recruitment for the Social Work Academy, and will sit on the interview panels.
- The CiCC will run training for potential foster carers on 4 December.
- The CiCC Christmas party will be held on 12 December and members are invited to attend. Any members wishing to make a donation or financial contribution to inform the Senior Partnership Officer.
- Discussions are taking place regarding the possibility of some young people from the CiCC attending meetings of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

## **11. Actions and outcomes from the CiCC meeting held on 24 October**

The Panel noted the minutes of the CiCC CPP meeting held on 24 October. At the meeting members and young people discussed promises to support looked after children. The promises were displayed on a powerpoint presentation (for copy of the presentation see file of minutes).

Panel members worked in groups to consider how the promises can be kept, what can be done to capture outcomes and how this can be shared with the CiCC. A note of the members' comments was taken.

The Senior Partnership Officer informed members that the next two meetings with the CiCC will be held on 17 April 2018 and 23 October 2018. Members were asked to note these dates in their diaries and were encouraged to attend. It is anticipated the events will take place on an evening at the Sjøvoll Centre, Pity Me, Durham. Further details will be circulated in due course.

## **12. Fostering Digital Roadshow**

At the meeting on 29 September, members were asked to consider how improvements could be made to the recruitment and marketing of foster carers.

Cllr McKeon informed the Panel that she had attended a meeting with the Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers and staff from the fostering and communications teams, to share feedback from these discussions with regard to the recruitment of foster carers.

Cllr McKeon notified members that it was agreed to launch a digital roadshow to roll-out to a range of community groups across the County during fostering fortnight in May 2018. Cllr McKeon asked members to let her know if they would be interested in participating in the project, or trailing this prior to county wide roll-out.

## **13. Any other business**

The Chair agreed the following matters should be reported under any other business:

### Ofsted Inspection

Helen Fergusson, Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers explained that an Ofsted Inspection on SEND services would be held during the week commencing Monday 27 November, with 12 schools being visited.

### Framwellgate Children's Home

The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence informed the Panel that Framwellgate Children's Home had received an outstanding Ofsted inspection for the third year running. The Panel commended all those who had contributed to this success.

## Aycliffe Secure Centre

The Panel noted that the new house at Aycliffe Centre is now open.

## Children and Social Work Act 2017

The Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers referred to new legislation, the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which received royal assent on 27 April 2017. This legislation places additional duties on corporate parents with seven corporate parenting principles. The legislation also includes guidance for implementing a local offer for care leavers and places a duty on authorities to provide all care leavers with a personal adviser up to the age of 25. Members were informed that the final consultation was due to close on 27 November and members were encouraged to inform the Head of Looked after Children and Care Leavers if they had any views they would like to include in the consultation.

## Regulation 44 Visits

Positive feedback had been received from Cllr Considine following her Regulation 44 visit during which she had observed good communication and speedy access to mental health support within the establishment.

## Visit to Aycliffe Centre

A visit to Aycliffe Centre will take place on 1 December. The Senior Partnership Officer agreed to make enquiries as to whether transport could be arranged.

## **14. Exclusion of the public**

### **Resolved:**

That under Section 100(a)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

## **15. Durham Local Safeguarding Children Board Serious Case Review Process**

The Panel considered a report and presentation of the LSCB Business Manager which provided members of the Corporate Parenting Panel with information on the processes involved in the Local Safeguarding Children Board Serious Case Review (SCR) (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

### **Resolved:**

That the report and presentation be noted.

## **16. Regulation 44 visits – Summary Report (including Responsive Repairs)**

The Panel noted a report of the Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers which provided a summary of the latest Regulation 44 visit action plans and responsive repairs for October 2017 attached as Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 of the report (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Panel noted that Regulation 44 visits for members are now quarterly.

### **Resolved:**

That the report be received.

## **17. Service Direct Meeting**

The Chair reported that a very positive meeting had taken place at Service Direct and meetings for the forthcoming year have been arranged.

## Corporate Parenting Panel

15 December 2017

### Analysis of the Rise in Looked After Children Numbers




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## Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Director of Transformation and Partnerships

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### Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to appraise members of the Corporate Parenting Panel of some analytical work that has been carried out into the increase in numbers of looked after children in Durham.

### Background

- 2 Durham County Council has the lead responsibility for ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children with a key aim to provide early help for children and families and protection for those who need it. The primary legislation that underpins this responsibility is the Children Act 1989. A fundamental principle of the Act is that children should be supported within their family unless it is necessary for their welfare to arrange for them to live outside their family.
- 3 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel will be familiar with the work that the local authority undertakes with regard to those children and young people who are looked after. They will also be aware that the number of children and young people in the looked after system has recently been increasing.
- 4 At its meeting on 24 November 2017, the Panel were appraised of the various circumstances in which a child would enter the looked after system. Whilst the local authority would always make decisions based on the best interests of the child before intervention, there are significant implications of an increase in looked after provision, both in financial and human costs.
- 5 Early experiences have long-term consequences for the emotional and mental health and social development of looked after children and young people. Life chances for children and young people who have been looked after remain poor compared to their non-looked after peers.
- 6 An increase in looked after children places increased cost pressures on the council in terms of placement costs and also work pressures in children's social care. The council also has a legal responsibility as corporate parent to ensure that the needs of all children and young people in their care are met.

## Looked After Children Analysis

- 7 There were 776 children looked after by Durham County Council at the end of November 2017. This compares to 760 at the end of November 2016 and 660 at November 2015.
- 8 When comparing with other local authorities, a rate of looked after children per 10,000 children and young people (aged 0-18 years old) is a useful measure. Our rate for Durham has increased significantly in recent years and is higher than the national average but remains well below the regional rate.

<b>Children looked after rate per 10,000 children under 18 (from 2014/15 to 2016/17)</b>				
<b>Financial Year</b>	<b>Durham</b>	<b>England</b>	<b>North East</b>	<b>Children's services statistical neighbour group</b>
2014/15	<b>61</b>	64	85	81
2015/16	<b>68</b>	65	88	82
2016/17	<b>81</b>	67	96	87

- 9 Increases in the number of children and young people in the looked after children were noted though regular quarterly performance monitoring reports and a more in depth analysis was commenced to better understand trends and identify any future improvements.
- 10 A presentation of the findings of this analysis will be shared with the Panel.

## Recommendation

- 11 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to:
- (a) Note the content of the presentation.
  - (b) Comment accordingly on the presentation.
  - (c) Indicate if any further information or analysis is required.

## Background papers

Corporate Parenting Panel Report – 24 November 2017 – Looked After Children: the Journey into the Looked After System

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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**Finance** – The number of looked after children for which the authority is responsible has significant implications in terms of increasing cost pressures.

**Staffing** – An increase in the number of looked after children places a greater demand on children’s social care staff.

**Risk** – The authority has a statutory responsibility to ensure that the welfare of children and young people across the county is actively promoted and that they are safeguarded from risk of significant harm.

**Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty** – None

**Accommodation** – None

**Crime and Disorder** – None

**Human Rights** – None

**Consultation** – None

**Procurement** – None

**Disability Issues** – None

**Legal Implications** – Legislation sets out a general duty of Durham County Council as the local authority looking after a child to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. This duty underpins all activity by the local authority in relation to looked after children.

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## Corporate Parenting Panel

15 December 2017



## Overview of Care Proceedings

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### Report of Kelsey Clayton, Legal Manager, Children, Adults and Health, Durham County Council

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#### Purpose of Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to raise awareness and understanding among members of the Corporate Parenting Panel about how the decision is made to issue Care Proceedings and the process which is followed once proceedings have been commenced.
- 2 Kelsey Clayton, Legal Manager for Children, Adults and Health will present a powerpoint presentation to members of the Corporate Parenting Panel which will highlight the main issues referred to in this report.

#### Background

- 3 Care proceedings can only be commenced by a local authority and the court may only make a care order or supervision order if it is satisfied that the grounds set out in section 31 Children Act 1989 are met;

*that the child concerned is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm; and*

*that the harm or likelihood of harm is attributable to –*

*(i) the care given to the child or likely to be given to him if the order were not made, not being what it would be reasonable to expect a parent to give to him; or*

*(ii) the child being beyond parental control*

“Harm” means ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development (including for example impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another).

“Development” means physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development.

“Health” means physical or mental health and “ill-treatment” includes sexual abuse and forms of ill-treatment which are not physical.

- 4 Section 1 of the Children Act sets out some fundamental principles which the local authority and the courts must always bear in mind:

When a court determines any question with respect to the upbringing of a child, the child's welfare shall be the court's paramount consideration, (Section 1(1)).

In any proceedings in which any question with respect to the upbringing of a child arises, the court shall have regard to the general principle that any delay in determining the question is likely to prejudice the welfare of the child, (Section 1(2)).

Where the court is considering whether to make, vary or discharge an order, the court shall have regard in particular to:

- (a) the ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child concerned (considered in the light of his age and understanding).
- (b) his physical, emotional and educational needs.
- (c) the likely effect on him of any change in his circumstances.
- (d) his age, sex, background and any characteristics of his which the court considers relevant.
- (e) any harm which he has suffered or is at risk of suffering.
- (f) how capable each of his parents and any other person in relation to whom the court considers the question to be relevant, is of meeting his needs.
- (g) the range of powers available to the court.

(Welfare Checklist Section 1(3))

- 5 In addition to the Children Act 1989 and various Regulations issued in accordance with the Act, the Government has also produced statutory guidance which local authorities are obliged to comply with unless there are exceptional reasons which justify a departure in individual cases.

The amended guidance "Court Orders and Pre-proceedings for local authorities" was issued in April 2014 by the Department for Education to coincide with the implementation of the Children and Families Act 2014. This amended the Children Act to introduce amongst other things the current Public Law Outline (PLO) process (which was referred to at the November meeting by Mark Gurney) and to introduce the requirement that care proceedings should conclude within 26 weeks of the date of issue unless the court decides there are exceptional circumstances which require the proceedings to be extended.

## Process for issuing Care Proceedings

- 6 Once the decision has been made that care proceedings should be issued, (usually following a discussion at PLO panel) the child's social worker prepares a witness statement which sets out the concerns held by the local authority, outlines the support which has been offered to parents and explains why the local authority consider that the child is suffering or will suffer significant harm if the child remains with, or returns to, the care of parents. The social worker must also prepare a care plan which sets out the arrangements for contact between the child and their parents and any other people who are important to the child and should also provide an overview of the support which is available to parents.
- 7 The evidence is submitted by the social worker to the local authority solicitor who carefully reviews the documents to ensure that all relevant information has been included and crucially, that the social worker has clearly outlined why the concerns held by the local authority mean that the child will suffer significant harm. If the local authority cannot prove this connection, the court will not be able to make an order. The local authority solicitor must also arrange witness statements from any other relevant professionals to support any concerns which they have identified, this could include health visitors, school teachers, community support workers, substance misuse workers etc.
- 8 The local authority solicitor prepares the court application and submits this to court with all the relevant evidence. Prior to the first court hearing, the solicitor will prepare a case summary which summarises the significant issues in the case for the court. Following the first hearing, the local authority solicitor is responsible for drafting the court order which must clearly identify all of the relevant matters discussed at court and then carefully set out all of the directions made by the Judge. In complex cases where perhaps there are a number of siblings who have different fathers and where the court may have directed assessments from a number of different experts, the court document can be very complex.
- 9 The local authority solicitor will usually attend the court hearing, but may use a barrister for example if the case is complex such as a serious non-accidental injury or sexual abuse case or where the hearing is listed at very short notice. If there is an emergency which requires an immediate application to court, it is not always possible for a solicitor to travel from the office to court which is usually in either Middlesbrough or Newcastle. There is no Family Court based in Durham, our work is dealt with at the Family Courts in Middlesbrough and Newcastle. Only hearings listed before magistrates are listed at courts in County Durham.
- 10 In accordance with the Public Law Outline, there should be only a limited number of court hearings. There is always a case management conference where the timetable is fixed and an issues resolution

hearing once all evidence and any further assessments are available, to see if the matter can be finalised without a full hearing. There will be a first hearing if the authority requests an interim care order and further interim hearings may be arranged to consider issues which arise during the proceedings. If a final hearing is required, this can take several days if the evidence is challenged by parents.

- 11 The only orders which the local authority can apply for are supervision orders or care orders under the Children Act 1989. If the plan for the child is for the child to remain in the care of a family member, either under a child arrangements order or a Special Guardianship Order, we can make it clear in the application that we will be inviting the court to conclude the care proceedings by making an appropriate private law order.
- 12 If the conclusion reached by the social worker following the completion of assessments, is that the only option for the child is to be placed for adoption, then the local authority must apply under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 for a placement order, before the care proceedings conclude. This requires a child permanence report (a detailed report setting out the reasons why adoption is being recommended) to be completed and submitted to the agency decision maker who will decide whether or not the child should be placed for adoption. That decision must be made prior to the final hearing of the care proceedings, to allow an application for a placement order to be prepared and submitted to court.
- 13 In addition to applications for care and supervision orders, this team also apply to court for defined contact orders in respect of children who are already the subject of care orders where there might be problems in making arrangements for contact with parents or other family members. We sometimes apply for placements orders after care proceedings have concluded eg: if the plan was to place a child with a family member but this plan has not been able to progress and the plan changes to adoption. We also make applications to court for secure accommodation orders. We also submit applications to court to discharge orders either where the child has returned home successfully or perhaps where the child's foster carer has indicated a wish to have a child arrangements order or special guardianship order which the local authority supports.

### **Recommendations**

- 14 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are requested to
  - note the information contained in the report and presentation
  - indicate if further information is required

### **Background Papers**

None

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**Contact: Kelsey Clayton**

**Tel No. 03000 269688**

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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**Finance – None**

**Staffing – None**

**Risk – None**

**Equality and diversity/Public Sector Equality Duty – None**

**Accommodation – None**

**Crime and disorder – None**

**Human rights –None**

**Consultation – None**

**Procurement –None**

**Disability Issues – None**

**Legal Implications-** The report highlights the legal basis for issuing care proceedings in respect of children and young people who live in County Durham.

# Corporate parenting resource pack

# Foreword

Looking after and protecting children and young people is one of the most important jobs that councils do and when a child, for whatever reason, can't safely stay at home, it is up to us as the local authority to step in and give them the care, support and stability that they deserve. This isn't just up to the lead member or director of children's services – we need everyone looking out for our most vulnerable children and young people, and every councillor has a role to play. This pack aims to help them fulfil that role as effectively as possible.

Being a corporate parent means doing everything we can for every child in the council's care – and every care leaver – to give them the opportunities that other children get. This covers everything from keeping an eye on their progress at school, to looking after their health and wellbeing, to preparing them for life as independent adults – and supporting them when they get there. We need to be ambitious for the children in our care, encouraging them to dream big and take chances even if they don't feel like that's been an option in the past.

It's also about the smaller things that make life more fulfilling. It's about making sure children receive birthday cards, are rewarded when they do well (and supported when they don't), get to take part in the activities they enjoy and have new experiences. It's about making sure someone's on the end of a phone when a care leaver is having a hard day at work or university, or is there to help them navigate an application form. It's about doing the things you'd do for your own children.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 defined for the first time in law the responsibility of corporate parents to ensure, as far as possible, secure, nurturing and positive experiences for looked-after children and young people, and care leavers. Councils across the country already do a fantastic job of this, and we've highlighted some examples in this pack. We'd be delighted to hear of any others to add to our online good practice database for others to learn from, to make sure every councillor has the tools they need to be a good corporate parent.

Many of the children who come into our care will face more challenges before they reach adulthood than any child should have to. It is our duty and our privilege to fight their corner and give them every opportunity to reach their potential.

**Councillor Richard Watts**

Chair, LGA Children and Young People Board

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# Corporate parenting an introduction

## What is a corporate parent?

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 says that when a child or young person comes into the care of the local authority, or is under 25 and was looked-after by the authority for at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday, the authority becomes their corporate parent. This means that they should:

- act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people
- encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings, and take them into account, while promoting high aspirations and trying to secure the best outcomes for them
- make sure they have access to services
- make sure that they are safe, with stable home lives, relationships and education or work
- prepare them for adulthood and independent living.

As corporate parents, it's every councillor's responsibility to make sure that the council is meeting these duties towards children in care and care leavers. Children can be in care in a range of different settings, with the authority acting as corporate parent to all of them. This includes foster care, children's homes, secure children's homes and kinship care.

Every councillor and officer within a council has a responsibility to act for those children and young people as a parent would for their own child. Lead members, those on corporate parenting panels, and overview

and scrutiny committees will have particular responsibilities, but for all councillors, this is where your role as the eyes and ears of the community is particularly important. Are there youth services in your ward that provide a vital service for looked-after children, and if so, how are you supporting them? Is there a children's home or care leaver accommodation in your ward? If foster carers in your ward provide care for disabled children, do they need any help to improve accessibility of local services? What feedback are you getting from residents? It's important to remember the need to protect the privacy of these children and young people, so work with officers to find out how you can best provide support.

For both officers and councillors, being a corporate parent means that when any service is being reviewed that could impact upon looked-after children and care leavers, or when you're hearing feedback from, or reports about, children in the council's care, consider:

**“What if this were my child?”**

**What can we do to put this right?”**

It is important to remember that, just as not all children are the same, looked-after children and care leavers are not one homogenous group. While it is true that some will have experienced trauma and disruption in their lives and need support to cope with those experiences, others will have adjusted well to being in care and may be flourishing. As corporate parents, councillors need to recognise the uniqueness of the children in their care, and make sure each child is getting what they need to do their best.

## Corporate parenting panel

As corporate parents, all councillors should seek to stay informed about children in the council's care, and care leavers. However, the establishment of a corporate parenting panel can provide a useful forum for regular, detailed discussion of issues, and a positive link with children in care forums. Members of the corporate parenting panel can also use their position to raise awareness of the role amongst colleagues, and provide support to the lead member for children's services.

It can be helpful to include senior officers on the panel, including from areas such as health and housing that have a significant impact on children in care and care leavers. In two-tier areas, consider how district council colleagues can be included.

The corporate parenting panel does not replace the duty of all councillors; members of all committees have a responsibility to consider how reports before them impact upon children in care and care leavers.

## Working with partners

Under the Children Act 2004, local authorities have a duty to promote cooperation between 'relevant partners', including the police, the NHS and education providers, while those partners have a duty to cooperate with the local authority in turn. Guidance on the Act highlights that corporate parenting is a 'task [that] must be shared by the whole local authority and partner agencies'.<sup>1</sup> Councils should consider how their partners can help them to deliver their corporate parenting role, especially in relation to the provision of services. The NHS has a responsibility to make sure looked-after children receive the physical and mental health support that they need, for example, while close working between schools and the virtual school head (VSH) can help to improve outcomes for children and young people in care.

1 The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations  
Volume 2: care planning, placement and case review

## Information and data

The lead member for children's services and those on the corporate parenting panel should receive regular progress reports with regard to looked-after children and care leavers, while data will be available to all members through reports presented to Full Council and scrutiny committees.

Data will be able to provide an overview of medium-to-long-term trends, but statistics on their own are not enough. Make sure that data is presented with the necessary context and explanations – for example, if fewer children are going missing, is this the result of a positive intervention that should be continued? Or are there issues with reporting? Also look for direction of travel, and comparisons with your statistical neighbours and national data to see where the council is performing well and what could be better.

However, as any parent will know, situations with children and young people change quickly, and statistics will not provide all the real-time data that you need. The corporate parenting panel should keep in close contact with the children in care council, independent reviewing officers (IROs) and the director of children's services (DCS) to make sure they're receiving up-to-date information and can respond quickly if needed.

## Safeguarding

Local authorities have a responsibility for safeguarding all children<sup>2</sup>, but there are certain risks that particularly affect children in care and care leavers that corporate parents need to be aware of.

Children in care are three times more likely to go missing than children not in care.<sup>3</sup> Processes must be in place to report missing children, take the appropriate action to find the child, and then to follow up with them when they are found to establish

2 Children Act 1989, Section 47

3 Ofsted (2013) 'Missing Children'

the underlying reasons for going missing. Corporate parents should be monitoring instances of children going missing, and how regularly return interviews are taking place (including for children placed out of area), as well as any emerging themes.

Child victims of modern slavery are particularly vulnerable, with nearly two thirds of trafficked children in local authority care going missing at some point; some within just one week.<sup>4</sup> Councils need to make sure a strong multi-agency approach is in place to protect victims from further risk from their traffickers and preventing trafficking from taking place. In particular, there should be a clear understanding between the local authority and the police of roles in planning for this protection and responding if a trafficked child goes missing. Council representatives on local multi-agency safeguarding partnerships should make sure there is oversight of those arrangements, and monitor how well they are being implemented and reviewed.

Children in care are also disproportionately likely to be at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE) than those in the general population, though it is important to remember that the vast majority of CSE victims are living at home. While those issues that led young people to need local authority care in the first place may increase their vulnerability to CSE, the experience of care itself can also be significant, especially if the child's placement lacks stability. Those at risk of CSE will need to have clear plans in place to protect them, and all social workers and partners should know how to spot signs of risk and deal with them appropriately.

The Local Government Association's (LGA) resource pack for councillors on tackling CSE, which contains detailed information on the issue, is available on: [www.local.gov.uk/tackling-child-sexual-exploitation-resource-pack-councils](http://www.local.gov.uk/tackling-child-sexual-exploitation-resource-pack-councils)

## Sufficiency

The council has a duty<sup>5</sup> to ensure, as far as is reasonably possible, sufficient accommodation is available locally to meet the needs of looked-after children and care leavers. This can be directly provided, or commissioned provision. Councils should regularly review their position on this, and report on how they intend to meet the sufficiency duty. This will be a valuable source of information for corporate parents.

## Sources of information

### Children in Care Council and other feedback mechanisms

There should be mechanisms in place to hear from children in care, with this information being reported regularly to the corporate parenting panel. There may also be an annual report submitted to Full Council. The format for reporting should be discussed with children and young people; some may wish to meet with councillors to discuss issues face-to-face, some may prefer to use mediators, and others may prefer online methods.

This feedback can provide rich information to act upon to make sure children in care and care leavers are getting what they need – from concerns about how they're kept informed about their placements, to how often they can see any siblings they aren't placed with, right down to whether they're happy with their pocket money.

### Independent Reviewing Officer annual report

Amongst other duties, IROs are responsible for making sure that the local authority, as a corporate parent, gives proper consideration and weight to children's wishes and feelings in their care plans, and that it genuinely responds to a child's needs.

The IRO manager should produce an annual report for the consideration of the corporate parenting panel, which should include areas of good practice, and areas for development.

4 ECPAT (2014) 'Trafficked Children Briefing October 2014'

5 Children Act 1989, Section 22G

It should include commentary on issues including the participation of children and their parents, and whether any resource issues are putting the delivery of a good service to all looked-after children at risk.

### **Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy**

Joint health and wellbeing strategies (JHWSs) are developed by local leaders to enable the planning and commissioning of integrated services that meet the needs of their whole local community. They particularly work to reduce health inequalities and support the needs of vulnerable groups and individuals; the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment underpinning the JHWS should include specific consideration of children in care and care leavers. The strategy (or associated delivery plan) will include targets, actions and who is responsible for implementing those actions.

The JHWS will be agreed by the health and wellbeing board, which should also monitor its implementation. Board meetings should be public, as should the JHWS, reports and meeting minutes.

### **Performance reports**

Reports should be published regularly updating on key indicators in relation to children in care, including direction of travel. These indicators are part of a nationally collected dataset reported to government, and include information on placement stability, outcomes for children in care and adoption. Your authority may also report on other indicators according to local priorities.

Key priorities to consider include:

- placement stability
- health data
- educational attainment
- proportion of care leavers in education, employment or training
- children in care being placed out of area or at a distance
- proportion of care leavers that the council has regular contact with
- availability of suitable housing for care leavers.

Further information on these points is included throughout this pack.

Performance reports should be publicly available, and should also be presented to a locally agreed committee – for example the corporate parenting panel, the relevant scrutiny committee or cabinet.

### **Feedback from foster parents**

Most children who are in care live with foster parents, and the quality and experience of those foster parents is key to delivering good outcomes for children. Each council will have different ways of gathering feedback from foster parents, including surveys and focus groups, along with different ways of reporting that feedback. The corporate parenting panel should receive updates on foster parent feedback, and this should be used to help inform support for foster parents, and to improve recruitment and retention.

The panel may also wish to consider ongoing input from foster carers by co-opting representatives onto the panel, or having regular meetings with carers to hear about experiences and receive feedback.

### **Stability Index**

Stability for children in care, where they are in an appropriate placement that meets their needs, is an important element in helping them to secure positive outcomes. To help support improved placement stability, the Children's Commissioner is developing a Stability Index to measure three aspects of children's experiences of care – placement moves, school moves, and changes in social worker. This was first published in April 2017 on the Children's Commissioner's website, with the intention of an annual publication to provide analysis and support for councils to improve provision and outcomes for children in care.

# Updates to legislation and practice

## National Quality Standards for Children's Homes

The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 set out nine Quality Standards which outline the aspirational and positive outcomes that all children's homes are expected to deliver.

These quality standards are:

- quality and purpose of care
- children's views, wishes and feelings
- education
- enjoyment and achievement
- health and wellbeing
- positive relationships
- protection of children
- leadership and management
- care planning.

Further information on each standard is outlined in the Department for Education's (DfE) Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations.

## New rules for out of area placements

Statutory guidance<sup>6</sup> has strengthened the responsibilities of local authorities to notify other local authorities if they place a looked-after child within their area. Children's homes are also now required to notify their host local authority when a child is placed with them by another authority.

<sup>6</sup> The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations  
Volume 2: care planning, placement and case review

An 'out of area' placement is classified as one outside of the council's geographical boundary, but within an authority that it shares a boundary with. If a child is placed in an authority that doesn't share a geographical boundary with the placing authority, that is classed as an 'at a distance' placement.

A responsible officer should be formally appointed by the DCS to approve out of area placements; this will often be an assistant director. All at a distance placements must be signed off by the DCS. This does not apply where the placement is with the parent, a connected person or a foster carer approved by the responsible authority.

The child's IRO should always be consulted prior to an out of area placement being made, and the wishes of the child should be taken into account. The host authority should also be consulted in advance in the case of out of area and distant placements, and notified when the placement is made.

## Staying put and staying close

'Staying put' is an arrangement that allows a looked-after child to continue to live with their foster carer after their 18th birthday, when they cease to be 'looked-after' by the local authority. This can take place where the council considers it appropriate, and both the young person and the carer want to enter a staying put arrangement.

A 'staying put' duty was introduced in the Children and Families Act 2014, which requires councils to monitor arrangements and provide advice and support (including

financial) to the foster parent and young person to facilitate the arrangement until the young person reaches 21.

A number of councils are currently trialling approaches to 'staying close' – a variant of staying put for young people leaving residential care – using funding from the DfE's Innovation Programme.

## Sir Martin Narey's Independent Review of Residential Care

Sir Martin Narey was commissioned by the Prime Minister in 2015 to carry out an independent review of children's residential care.

The final report was published in July 2016 and contained 34 recommendations. These included ways to improve commissioning of places in children's homes, and to encourage development of the right sort of provision where it is needed.

Sir Martin also recommended a review of fostering provision, and the need for sharing of best practice across a range of areas.

Several areas of national policy were also singled out as needing review, including guidance around planning, the use of restraint, and the recording of criminal offences to avoid the unnecessary criminalisation of children in care. Changes to Ofsted inspections of children's homes and guidance were also recommended.

Finally, Sir Martin highlighted ways to improve staffing, including making sure social work students spent part of their placement within a children's home to make sure new staff are getting experience across the sector.

## Fostering stocktake

Following Sir Martin Narey's recommendation in July 2016, the DfE has launched a fostering stocktake, which is also being led by Sir Martin. The aim of the stocktake is to understand what is working well and why, where improvements are needed to achieve better outcomes for children and to identify areas where further research is needed.

Evidence has been sought from a wide range of stakeholders, with the LGA as active participants, and the final report is due at the end of 2017.

## Care Leaver Strategy 2016

The Government published a new Care Leaver Strategy in July 2016, entitled 'Keep on caring: supporting young people from care to independence'.

The strategy strengthens the role of the corporate parent, paving the way for the provisions in the Children and Social Work Act 2017; pledges to use Innovation Programme funding to trial new ways to support young people leaving care; and looks at improving the measurement of outcomes for care leavers.

## Statutory guidance: Children who go missing from care

Statutory guidance was issued in January 2014 on children who run away or go missing from home or care.

The guidance highlights the need for a children's services authority to name a senior children's service manager as responsible for monitoring policies and performance relating to children who go missing from home or care. The responsible manager should understand the risks and issues facing missing children and review best practice in dealing with the issue.

Councils should agree a protocol, with the police and other partners, for dealing with children who run away or go missing in their area. Protocols should be agreed and reviewed regularly with all agencies and be scrutinised by local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. Where appropriate, agreed protocols should also be in place with neighbouring authorities.

## Statutory guidance: Promoting the education of looked-after children

The Children and Families Act 2014 places a duty on every children's services authority in England to appoint a virtual school head (VSH) – an officer employed to make sure that the council's duty to promote the educational achievement of its looked-after children, those looked-after under special guardianship orders and adopted children, is properly discharged.

This statutory guidance, issued in July 2014, details that duty, and highlights that as corporate parents, councils should have high aspirations for the children they look after. The guidance outlines the ways in which authorities should work to close the attainment and progress gap between looked-after children and their peers, and to make sure that looked-after children have access to high quality education.

## Statutory guidance: Special guardianship

New guidance was issued in January 2017 on special guardianship, outlining the issues local authorities should take into account when preparing reports for the court to apply for special guardianship orders. This includes information about the child's needs, and more detailed assessments of the child's relationship with, and the parenting capacity of, the prospective special guardian, both now and longer-term.

## Children and Social Work Act 2017

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 defines, for the first time in law, the role of corporate parents, in addition to expanding and extending support for care leavers, for example through the publication of a 'local offer for care leavers' and making personal advisers available for care leavers up to the age of 25.

The Act also sets out revised arrangements for local multi-agency safeguarding partnerships to replace local safeguarding children boards (LSCBs). Under the new provisions, the local authority, clinical commissioning group and the police have a shared responsibility to make arrangements for themselves and 'relevant agencies' to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the area. These statutory partners should make sure that all appropriate agencies are involved meaningfully in the partnership, and in particular should look at the engagement of schools, including academies and free schools, which have a key role to play in safeguarding children and young people.

# Key lines of enquiry for all councillors

## What are the characteristics of our cohort of children in care and care leavers?

Understanding the characteristics of children and young people is the first step to making sure that councils are able to act in their interests. The Children in Care team will have information on the children in the council's care, including:

- age and length of time in care
- where children are placed
- number of children in foster care, secure units, children's homes or other placements
- number of children awaiting adoption
- number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- placement stability
- accommodation and employment information about care leavers.

The corporate parenting panel and children's scrutiny committee should also receive information about social worker caseloads, to make sure that these are manageable and social workers are able to dedicate sufficient time to children, regardless of their needs.

Find out how this information compares to that of other authorities in your statistical group, and to the national picture, and look at direction of travel to help spot trends and areas of concern. Everyone with a local authority email address has access to LG Inform<sup>7</sup>, which provides a rich source of data for use by councils.

<sup>7</sup> <http://lginform.local.gov.uk>

## Do all of our councillors and officers know about their corporate parenting responsibilities?

Every councillor should ideally have training on their corporate parenting role when first elected. It is every councillor's responsibility to consider how new plans and policies might affect children in care, and to ask questions to ensure that those children are getting the best outcomes.

There are certain departments within a council that this will be particularly important for, such as education, housing and skills, but every part of the council needs to consider how its work impacts on children in care and care leavers. Look at how business plans and reports are structured – are officers proactively considering the needs of children in the council's care, or could this be improved?

Consider ways of raising awareness about the corporate parenting role, for example inviting all councillors to any celebration events, or inviting the children in care council to give feedback at Full Council or relevant committee meetings.

## Do our partner agencies understand their role in supporting us as corporate parents?

The council has a duty, under Section 10 of the Children Act 2004, to promote cooperation between local partners to improve the wellbeing of young people in the area. This includes:

- physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing
- protection from harm and neglect
- education, training and recreation
- the contribution made by young people to society
- social and economic wellbeing.

Relevant partners include the police, probation services, the NHS, schools and further education providers.

The participation of partners in work to promote the wellbeing of all children and young people is vital, and it's important that they understand the specific needs of children in care so that this can be taken account of in their plans. For example, children in care are more likely to need support with their mental health, so colleagues in the NHS will need to consider this, while close working with the police to protect children who are at risk of going missing is essential. The phrase 'it takes a village to raise a child' is pertinent here; the council alone cannot provide all the support that a child in care needs, and all local services have a responsibility to keep children safe and well.

Consider how existing partnership forums, such as local safeguarding partnerships and health and wellbeing boards, are taking into account the needs of children in care in their plans, and consider whether other partners might wish to support your ambitions for children in care. For example, local businesses might consider offering apprenticeships to children in care, or leisure facilities might be able to offer discounts or free memberships.

## How are we giving children and young people the chance to express their views, wishes and feelings? How do we know those are being acted on?

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. Children should be involved in developing their care plans, and provided with advocates to help them do this wherever necessary. Likewise, care leavers need to be integral to the development of their pathway plans. Social workers make the necessary arrangements for this to happen, and IROs should ensure children and young people are listened to, and their views taken seriously. IROs should provide feedback on how well this is happening.

Most councils have established children in care councils, comprising any looked-after children and care leavers who want to take part (though some councils hold a separate care leavers' forum, depending on what young people ask for); for councils that haven't done so, it is worth considering this or an alternative method of feedback that's appropriate for looked-after children in the area. They should be able to set the agenda so that they can talk about what matters to them, and they should also decide how they would like to engage with the corporate parenting panel – whether that's through joint meetings, feeding back via a mediator, or something else.

Don't forget, however, that not all children will want to take part in group forums – there should be mechanisms set up to allow all children and young people to express their views in a way that they're comfortable with.

Also consider how to engage with children with special educational needs and disabilities, or those who may face cultural or

language barriers to engaging in feedback processes. In some cases, there may be safeguarding concerns about children with particularly complex needs being asked to take part in certain ways of giving feedback – there should be sensitive discussions between the children’s carers, advocates, the complex needs team, social workers and any other relevant professionals to find the best ways of engaging these children, who should still have the opportunity to say how they feel about their care.

Very young children may also find it harder to explain their wishes and feelings, and there will inevitably be children and young people who actively disengage from review meetings or feedback forums. Consider also those children placed out of area and at a distance. All looked-after children and care leavers have a right to be heard, and support must be put in place to give them that opportunity.

Review how feedback from children in care and care leavers is fed back to the whole council so that it can be factored into all relevant decisions – from housing and employment to education and public health.

Regardless of how feedback is collected, make sure that all children and young people (not just those who attend forums or participated in the feedback exercise) find out what has been done as a result of that feedback – show the young people that their voices are being heard, and changes are being made as a result.

## How do we show children in our care that we have high aspirations for them?

Councils should be ambitious for every child in their care, working with and encouraging them to achieve their full potential, from overcoming early instability or trauma to progressing well in education, learning and training, depending on what’s most appropriate for the individual child.

It’s important to recognise that children in care are likely to have had very different experiences to their peers, therefore they might be at very different stages at school to other children of the same age. Additionally, in 2016, 57.3 per cent of children in care had a special educational need, compared to 14.4 per cent of all children.<sup>8</sup> Providing the appropriate support can help children begin to overcome some of these difficulties, and research shows that children in care achieve better educational outcomes than children in need who stay at home, thanks to the protective factor of that care.<sup>9</sup> The VSH will keep the council updated with how looked-after children are progressing in school, what support is provided to those with learning difficulties, and what action is being taken to help them reach their potential.

Children and young people thrive on recognition and reward, and it’s important to make sure that children in care receive this in the same way children in the rest of the population do. Award ceremonies, money for carers to take children for a celebration of a sports win, or a congratulations card from the lead member for a good school report will all help to reassure children that their efforts are recognised, supported and cared about.

As young people approach leaving care, they should be getting support from their social worker and a personal adviser to consider their future options. The VSH can make sure that young people are encouraged to think broadly and ambitiously about their options, and how to get there.

<sup>8</sup> DfE (2017) ‘Outcomes for children looked-after by local authorities in England’

<sup>9</sup> Rees Centre (2015) ‘Educational Progress of Looked-after Children’

## Are we providing stable environments for children in our care?

Stability for children and young people is linked to improved mental health and educational attainment.<sup>10</sup> It also helps children to develop relationships, feel more secure, and develop a sense of belonging.

That said, clearly statistics alone cannot be taken on face value. A child or young person should not stay in an unsuitable placement, while a change of social worker to one with a smaller caseload may ultimately be positive for the child – provided this is well managed.

Ten per cent of looked-after children had three or more foster care placements in 2015-16.<sup>11</sup> Analysis by the Office of the Children's Commissioner also found that 24 per cent of children experienced at least one school move that year, and 35 per cent saw their social worker change at least once.<sup>12</sup> One child in twenty experienced a change of placement, school and social worker over the course of a year.<sup>13</sup>

It's important that the council understands the reasons for any instability experienced by children, and takes action to limit this where it is not in their best interests, while recognising that some moves may be unavoidable.

## What are we doing to look after the health and wellbeing of children in our care?

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment should include consideration of the needs of children in care and care leavers<sup>14</sup>, with an accompanying Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS) in place to meet those needs and minimise inequalities. The health and wellbeing board is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the JHWS.

Particular issues to look out for include:

- mental health services – children in care are four times more likely to have a mental health difficulty than children in the general population<sup>15</sup>
- sexual health and family planning services – a quarter of young women leaving care are pregnant, and nearly half become pregnant within two years<sup>16</sup>
- drug and alcohol prevention services – a third of young people leaving care report problems with drugs or alcohol within a year.<sup>17</sup>

It's important to remember that while many children in care will be happy and well-adjusted, some will have experienced significant trauma, others will have lived unstable home lives, and some may lack good support networks. It's the responsibility of councils, as corporate parents, to work hard to tackle those issues and support the children in their care as they work to overcome difficulties that most children in the general population might never have to deal with.

If a child has experienced one or more placement moves, check whether health records are being passed between carers so

10 Children's Commissioner (2017) 'Stability Index for Children in Care: Technical Report'

11 DfE (2016) 'Children looked-after in England (including adoption) year ending 31 March 2016'

12 Children's Commissioner (2017) 'Stability Index for Children in Care: Technical Report'

13 Ibid

14 Statutory Guidance on Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies

15 NSPCC (2017) 'Children in Care: Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health'

16 HM Government (2016) 'Keep On Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence'

17 Ibid

that things like regular dental check-ups and standard vaccinations aren't being missed. Looked-after children should receive an annual health assessment (every six months for under-fives)<sup>18</sup>, but make sure these are being carried out in a child-friendly way – some children find these intrusive and feel they are unnecessary, so make sure they understand why they are taking place and that they know their right to opt out. Pass on feedback about assessments to the clinical commissioning group (CCG), which carries them out, and check whether this is being acted on.

Consider also issues like access to sports facilities and music lessons or other activities outside of school, which will contribute to a child's wellbeing and sense of belonging. What happens to these if a child changes placement? Are care leavers helped to keep accessing activities to support their wellbeing? And what is the local offer for care leavers?

A significant issue for looked-after children and care leavers is having a support network. If they aren't able to rely on family, and if they've experienced multiple placement or school moves, they might not have had a chance to build up a network of their own. Look at what's being done to help them develop relationships that will support them both now and when they leave care, and see what help is available locally – are there volunteer mentors or support groups, for example? All looked-after children should be offered the chance to have an independent visitor – a volunteer to befriend and support them consistently, providing a relationship with an adult who isn't their carer or social worker. Having stable placements and social workers will also help children to feel more secure and help them learn to develop positive relationships.

It is important to respect the diversity and individual needs of children in care and care leavers, and to make sure that those needs are responded to appropriately.

<sup>18</sup> DfE (2015) 'Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked-After Children'

This includes catering for the cultural and religious needs of children, and support for children's emotional wellbeing including, for example, issues around gender identity and sexuality.

## What are outcomes like for our care leavers?

As a corporate parent, it's up to you to make sure that care leavers are getting the support they need to lead successful lives.

Care leavers can face a wide variety of challenges and, depending on their individual needs, they might need the support of their personal adviser and social worker to overcome their own hurdles to progress – and they need to know that support is there as they make the transition from a looked-after child to independent living.

Each young person's pathway plan should consider their options for when they've left school, whether they want to go on to further study or straight into the world of work. Work should start on this plan well in advance of a young person leaving care.

For those aiming for university and further education, children in care should be getting support at school to help them get achieve the best results they're capable of, and the VSH will know what interventions are working best or could be expanded. It's also important to look at pathway plans to see how children are reassured about university – it's a scary prospect for most young people, so care leavers need to know how they'll manage their finances, and where they can go during the long university holidays.

For those that don't go on to university, how many are not in education, employment or training – and what is the council doing to improve that? Are the statistics getting better or worse? Find out how care leavers factor into your authority's recruitment, skills and economic development strategies, including access to apprenticeships and work experience.

The availability of suitable housing is a key issue for care leavers, as is preparation for moving on to independent living. Care leavers should not be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, and the type of housing that they will move into after leaving care should be included in the pathway plan. Some young people will need more support than others as they move towards independence, while all will need to know that there are fall-back options if things don't work out.

For more information on support and outcomes for care leavers, please see our 'Support for care leavers resource pack'.

## How many children are we placing in out of area placements and why?

Every children's services council has a 'sufficiency duty', which states that it must take steps to secure, as far as possible, sufficient accommodation within its area to meet the needs of children that it is looking after. But there is no one-size-fits-all approach to meeting the needs of individual children, and there are often very good reasons why some children are placed outside their home authority. This could be for their own safety, to break gang affiliation, to place them near other family members or to access specialist services.

If your council is placing a higher proportion of children out of area than its statistical neighbours, or than it was two years ago, for example, it is important to ask why. Is this because the children need very specialist placements that can only be found elsewhere, or because there are not enough placements locally? If the latter, what is being done to improve this? If children are moved out of area, this may mean moving them away from their school, their friends and family, and the area they're familiar with – it's important that if that happens, it's for the right reasons and that appropriate support is provided to help the young person manage that transition.

## How are we planning for the future and commissioning services?

If a council has too many children and young people being placed out of area inappropriately, it will need to revisit its sufficiency strategy and revise plans and commissioning to address this. The council will need a strong understanding of what its needs are now and into the future, which it can identify by looking at the data and feedback available, and analysing local and national trends. Councils can then use this information to better manage the local market, whether through recruiting and training more foster carers; evaluating the use of in-house and external provision; and considering the balance of children's home places or foster care with high levels of support for children with complex needs.

Consider also the way in which services for looked-after children are commissioned; are services better commissioned at a local (how local?) or regional level? Would children and young people's outcomes be improved if resources were pooled with partners for specific outcomes, such as early intervention or wellbeing? Are young people involved at any point in commissioning processes, to make sure that services meet their needs?

If in-house provision is an issue, feedback from foster carers – both those that are still working for your authority, and those that have either stopped fostering or moved to an independent fostering agency (IFA) – will be important to find out whether things need to be improved to increase the number of in-house carers.

## How well do we support our foster carers?

It's vital that foster carers feel well supported so that they feel able to provide the best possible care to children and young people, and to encourage them to foster for as long as they are able.

The Fostering Network's State of the Nation Report 2016 identified the following three issues that foster carers would choose to change to improve their ability to care for children:

- improved communication and support
- being treated more as a professional
- better financial support.

These issues highlight the importance of making sure that foster carers are listened to and have access to the right kind of support when they need it. For example, how are foster carers involved in care plan reviews? Do all in-house carers have up-to-date training plans? Is there good support available if there's a problem in the middle of the night? How much freedom are carers given to make decisions for their foster children?

It's important to remember that a foster carers' role is to provide a loving, caring home for a child, rather than to be a council employee; being treated as professionals is about their being valued, respected members of the team whose knowledge and understanding of the child is given appropriate weight in all decisions.

It's also essential that wherever possible, foster carers are kept fully informed about children coming into and leaving their care, and up-to-date with planned changes. This allows them to provide the right support and ease transitions for their foster children.

Financial support can be an issue for any carer, but in particular there may be concerns around carers with young people in staying put arrangements. While they still receive fees and allowances, these are lower than

for fostering placements, which can be problematic where fostering is a major source of income for the family, and may make it difficult for families to continue supporting a young person.

Your best source of information about whether your foster carers feel adequately supported is from foster carers themselves; feedback should be considered by the corporate parenting panel, who can then make recommendations for improvements.

# Local case studies

## Hampshire County Council

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Being a good corporate parent means getting involved, asking questions and making sure the voices of children and young people are being heard.

When the children's residential service was under review in Hampshire, the Lead Member for Children's Services took the opportunity to find out exactly what children wanted and needed, and to make sure their voices were at the centre of any new proposals. This included visiting existing homes – owned both by the council and other sectors – to find out about the experiences of the children living there, and to see what they thought made a 'homely environment'.

At the same time, work was underway to implement the evidence-based Pillars of Parenting model, an approach to move from 'looking after' children to 'caring for' them, and providing strong support for staff including access to an educational psychologist. Children were involved in board meetings as the new care model was put in place, ensuring that they could flag up any issues with the model and let officers and councillors know how they felt about the changes.

In one small children's home using the Pillars of Parenting model, stability for the children living there was found to be better, involvement in crime was reduced, and engagement in education was good. The improved outcomes for children as a result of the new care model and the small, well-located home provided a good evidence-base to support what young people were saying.

The Lead Member took those views and the evidence directly back to his fellow elected members, emphasising the benefits the council could realise – both in terms of outcomes for children in care, and financially thanks to those long-term outcomes – by selling old, larger children's homes with poor community links to support new homes more suited to caring for children. As a result, he was able to successfully bid for considerable investment from the council to provide six new homes.

The Lead Member has continued to champion children's views as the process has continued, attending workshops where children contributed to the design of the new homes, and regularly visiting the homes during the build process to make sure they met the varied needs of the children he'd been speaking to. He has also worked with officers on keeping his fellow corporate parents engaged, with many visiting children's homes, and some even taking their dogs along to meet the children – a great ice breaker.

For more information, please contact: [cathi.hadley@hants.gov.uk](mailto:cathi.hadley@hants.gov.uk)

## Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

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In Stockton-on-Tees, councillors and officers have worked hard to make sure that the voices of looked-after children and care leavers are not only listened to – they are seen to make a real difference to services.

Virtually all care leavers – 93 per cent, well above the national average – move on to suitable accommodation of their choice, thanks in no small part to careful listening to the needs of care leavers, and the work of ‘Young Inspectors’. These young people review all semi-independent accommodation to check that it’s somewhere they would like to live, and make sure the corporate management team takes action to tackle any areas found to be in need of improvement.

The ‘Let’s Take Action’ group, part of the Children in Care Council, is a group of young people who meet fortnightly to develop projects and initiatives to support the voice of the young people they represent. Their work has included developing a pledge for children in care for senior leaders to work to, delivering workshops on finance and budgeting challenges and speaking at corporate parenting events. One of the members of this group recently won a Civic Award in Stockton as ‘young person of the year’.

The council also took part in The Fostering Network’s ‘Inspiring Voices’ project to raise awareness of, and engagement with, children in care councils. In Stockton-on-Tees, the group consists of young people, who chair the meeting, foster carers, senior council officers and key partners. The group has worked together on a range of projects to respond to the needs of children in care and care leavers, from developing welcome packs for children coming into care, producing information packs on corporate parenting for councillors, and reviewing how young people are engaged and what is then done with that information.

During Ofsted’s latest visit, inspectors commented on how children’s voices were clearly heard, praising the “very healthy culture” promoted by senior managers and political leaders to make sure that learning from the views of looked-after children and young people was taken on board, and to involve them in shaping services.

For more information, please contact: [martin.gray@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:martin.gray@stockton.gov.uk)

Gloucestershire aims to put the voice of children and young people at the heart of its approach to corporate parenting, with children in care, young people with experience of children's services and corporate parents working together on everything from strategic planning and service delivery to training and consultation.

One of the key ways that Gloucestershire is working to incorporate the voice of children and young people is through their Ambassadors for Vulnerable Children and Young People, which was highlighted as a strength in an otherwise difficult Ofsted inspection for the authority. These young people, aged 16-25, all have experience of children's social care – whether through being in care, experiencing early help, or receiving support for a disability, for example – and play a central role in developing the council's services. They also act as a link between children and young people and the rest of the council, making sure those voices are heard.

As Participation Manager Della Price highlights, "Ambassadors help us to keep our focus on, and communicate effectively with, children and young people; they challenge us, work with us, and often identify areas of our work that might be neglected. Most importantly, they've changed our attitudes, understanding and awareness of the issues that are important to children and young people".

Ambassadors are recruited annually, with 12 currently in post, and are paid for their time and expenses whenever they attend meetings or events. They attend the Children in Care Council so that they can feed back to the Corporate Parenting Group, which they are co-opted onto, and have led consultation with looked-after children to help improve everything from the activities children do with their social workers, to issues around contact with family; their own experiences make them ideally placed to help communicate the needs and wants of children back to corporate parents. They have also been part of task groups to improve the quality of care plans, improve questions on fostering panels, and to secure a pilot of personal budgets for children in care who need mental health support. The early involvement of young people in the latter was instrumental in gaining the support of NHS England for the pilot, highlighting the way in which the council places the voice of young people at the heart of their work for looked-after children.

The council has involved the Ambassadors in the design of information for young people, which has been highly successful, for example leading to more young people attending fostering panels as they now understand better what goes on, and improving the use of the MOMO app so that children in care can get help with things they are worried about more easily.

This year, all councillors will receive training from the Ambassadors about the role of members as corporate parents, while each year, Ambassadors run workshops as part of the Virtual School Designated Teacher training. The Ambassadors have also helped the Children in Care Council to host meetings with councillors, which have had excellent feedback from the children, who feel listened to, and the councillors, whose understanding of being a child in care has improved significantly.

For more information, please contact: [\*\*della.price@gloucestershire.gov.uk\*\*](mailto:della.price@gloucestershire.gov.uk)

## London Borough of Lambeth

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Any good parent will know that the needs of their children always come first – and Lambeth Council is committed to putting that philosophy into practice with all the children for whom it is a corporate parent.

Where children are placed in residential care, the council works hard to develop and maintain strong partnerships with those providers to make sure that the children's individual needs and wants are properly taken care of.

In the case of 14-year-old Amy, this has meant support to feel stable in her children's home, and honouring her wish to stay in that home with those she describes as 'family', rather than transferring into foster care. The council and the children's home have worked together to find ways to help her develop her confidence and self-esteem, including providing piano lessons to nurture her passion for music.

Amy is now considering whether she wants to move on to foster care as she gets older, so both the children's home and the council are starting to plan with her. Most importantly, they are working at a pace that suits her, rather than trying to rush her, making sure that her voice is at the forefront of any decision – as any parent knows, children and young people need support and encouragement to work through big decisions, to make sure that they can come to the right decision long-term.

The relationship between the council and the provider is a vital one – much like the relationship between two parents. Trust, mutual respect and good communication mean that both parties can concentrate on working towards the same outcome – a successful and positive care experience for all children being looked-after.

For more information, please contact: [communications@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:communications@lambeth.gov.uk)

## Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council

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When a young person presents as homeless to a local authority, and they have not been in care before their 16th birthday, the authority's responsibilities in law are very limited, requiring only advice and assistance. In Trafford, the Corporate Parenting Board and officers felt that, despite not being corporate parents in such cases in legislative terms, they still had a responsibility to these vulnerable young people, who were homeless and in need of trusted professional support; doing the bare minimum was not good enough.

They agreed to provide these young people with a full leaving care service, with support from a personal adviser, a pathway plan, safe and appropriate accommodation, support to live independently and help to engage in education, employment and training. The leaving care grant could also be awarded in certain circumstances.

Ofsted was very supportive of the approach, which is an example of how councillors and officers can and do still step in to help young people – even where they don't have to, and where it isn't easy, just as other good parents would.

For more information, please contact: [aftercare@trafford.gov.uk](mailto:aftercare@trafford.gov.uk)

# Key resources and further reading

Centre for Public Scrutiny **Safeguarding Children: A Practical Guide for Overview and Scrutiny Councillors** June 2016

[www.cfps.org.uk/safeguarding-children-practical-guide-os-councillors](http://www.cfps.org.uk/safeguarding-children-practical-guide-os-councillors)

Department for Education **Children Act 1989 Statutory Guidance: care planning, placement and case review** March 2010 (updated July 2015)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-care-planning-placement-and-case-review>

Department for Education **Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care** January 2014

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/307867/Statutory\\_Guidance\\_-\\_Missing\\_from\\_care\\_\\_3\\_.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care__3_.pdf)

Department for Education **Promoting the education of looked after children – statutory guidance for local authorities** July 2014

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/335964/Promoting\\_the\\_educational\\_achievement\\_of\\_looked\\_after\\_children\\_Final\\_23-....pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335964/Promoting_the_educational_achievement_of_looked_after_children_Final_23-....pdf)

Department for Education **Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards** April 2015

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/463220/Guide\\_to\\_Children\\_s\\_Home\\_Standards\\_inc\\_quality\\_standards\\_Version\\_\\_1.17\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/463220/Guide_to_Children_s_Home_Standards_inc_quality_standards_Version__1.17_FINAL.pdf)

Department for Education **Special Guardianship Guidance** January 2017

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/586406/Special\\_Guardianship\\_Statutory\\_Guidance\\_20\\_January\\_2017.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/586406/Special_Guardianship_Statutory_Guidance_20_January_2017.pdf)

HM Government **Keep On Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence** July 2016

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/535899/Care-Leaver-Strategy.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/535899/Care-Leaver-Strategy.pdf)

Local Government Association **Tackling child sexual exploitation: LGA resource pack for councils** December 2014

[www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/tackling-child-sexual-exp-8d3.pdf](http://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/tackling-child-sexual-exp-8d3.pdf)

National Children's Bureau **Corporate Parenting Tool Kit** 2013

[https://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/corporate\\_parents%20toolkit.pdf](https://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/corporate_parents%20toolkit.pdf)

# Glossary of useful terms

## **Advocacy**

An advocate's role is to make sure that the child's views and experiences are considered when decisions are made about their future. Every child has the right to be supported by an advocate and councils must have a system in place to provide written, age appropriate information to each looked-after child about advocates and how to request one.

## **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)**

All services that work with children and young people experiencing emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulties.

## **Care order**

A court order approving the case for a child to be taken into care.

## **Care plan**

A care plan should be developed for every child and young person when they come into care. This should identify how the child will be accommodated, how long it is anticipated that the care order will last, and formulate planned outcomes for the child with associated actions. The plan should be reviewed at least every six months.

## **Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)**

These commission most hospital and community NHS services in their area, including mental health and learning disability services.

## **Child sexual exploitation (CSE)**

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

## **Children's home**

A residential facility where groups of children are cared for by qualified workers.

## **Former relevant child**

A care leaver aged 18-21 who was a relevant child or was in care until the age of 18. Young people who are still getting help with education or training remain 'former relevant' until their training has finished.

## **Foster care**

Foster care is a way for children to be cared for within a family setting when their own family is unable to care for them. It is considered temporary in that there is no legal split from the family (as with adoption), but can be long term where this is in the best interests of the child.

## **Independent Fostering Agency (IFA)**

IFAs provide fostering services to local authorities. They recruit, train and support their own foster carers who the council can then place a child with on payment of a fee. IFAs can be charities, not-for-profit or profit-making.

### **Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)**

An IRO chairs a looked-after child's review(s) and monitors the child's case on an ongoing basis. They ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects their current needs, wishes and feelings, and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child.

### **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)**

JSNAs identifies the current and future health needs of the local population to inform and guide commissioning of health, wellbeing and social care services within local authority areas.

### **Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS)**

The JHWS outlines how local partners will work to improve health in the local population and reduce health inequalities.

### **Kinship care**

Kinship care is where a child is looked-after by a relative or a friend, but the local authority still has legal responsibility for them.

### **Modern slavery**

Modern slavery encompasses slavery, servitude, and forced or compulsory labour and human trafficking. A person is trafficked if they are brought to (or moved around) a country by others who threaten, frighten, hurt and force them to do work or other things they don't want to do.

### **Pathway Plan**

A Pathway Plan is developed by the local authority with a young person in care as they approach their 16th birthday to help them effectively make the transition from care to living independently. It includes areas such as accommodation, education, life skills and health.

### **Personal Education Plan (PEP)**

The PEP is a statutory part of a child's care plan, making sure that all relevant partners are engaged in a child's education, tracking their progress and giving them the support they need to achieve and be aspirational in their education.

### **Private arrangement**

An informal arrangement where a child or young person is looked-after by a close relative such as grand-parents, aunts or uncles.

### **Private fostering**

An informal arrangement where a child or young person is looked-after by someone who is not their parent or close relative. The local authority should ideally be informed of the arrangement, but is not responsible for the child and is therefore not the corporate parent.

### **Secure children's home**

Secure children's homes offer specialist care and intensive support in a secure setting to young people sentenced by the courts and to young people detained for their own welfare (for example, where children are at risk of child sexual exploitation, and likely to place themselves in risky situations). These are referred to as youth justice beds, and welfare beds respectively.

### **Special guardianship**

Special guardianship means that a child lives with carers who have parental responsibility for them until they turn 18, but legal ties with the parents are not cut as with adoption. The child is no longer the responsibility of the local authority.

### **Staying Put**

An arrangement whereby a looked-after child can stay with their foster carer after the age of 18, as long as both the young person and the foster parent is happy with this arrangement, and it is in the young person's best interests. The council has a duty to support the arrangement up to young person's 21st birthday.

### **Sufficiency Duty**

The duty for a council to take steps that secure, as far as possible, sufficient accommodation within its area to meet the needs of children that it is looking after.

### **Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC)**

The definition of an unaccompanied asylum seeking child is set out in the Immigration Rules as someone who:

- is under 18 years of age when the claim is submitted;
- is claiming in their own right; and
- is separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who in law or by custom has responsibility to do so.

### **Virtual School Head**

All local authorities must have a virtual school head (VSH) in charge of promoting the educational achievement of the children looked-after by that authority. Their role is to know how the looked-after children are doing, and help school staff and social workers to find out about the extra needs of these children and any additional support available to them. VSHs also work with the children's services department and all schools in the area on initiatives to promote the education of children in care.







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please contact us on 020 7664 3000.  
We consider requests on an individual basis.

# Support for care leavers resource pack

# Foreword

Striking out into the world on your own for the first time is exciting and daunting for all of us. The opportunity to carve your own path and the newfound independence is a huge draw. On the other hand, learning to budget to keep on top of the bills, remembering to put a wash on in time so that you have clean clothes for work on Monday morning, and managing to keep the fridge stocked, let alone keeping yourself healthy – it's a huge learning curve for any young person.

It's even more difficult for those without supportive families to fall back on, or for those who can't stay at home for other reasons. Those who have grown up, or spent time, in care don't always have the luxury of a family home to return to if something goes wrong, or a parent to phone when they aren't sure how to fix a problem.

That's where we come in.

As corporate parents to care leavers, it's our job to make sure that these young people are ready for what's next, know they're supported as they take those first steps into independence, and to help them access the same opportunities as their peers have – without worrying that if they make a mistake, they won't get another chance.

We need to give them the practical, social and emotional support that any good parent gives their child, from help to find the right accommodation, to guiding them through job applications and interviews, to making sure they know where to turn if they're having trouble.

We also need to make sure we're listening. If we can really hear what care leavers are telling us about their needs, dreams and ambitions, we can make sure we're giving the right support to help them get there.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 extended support for care leavers by clarifying in law our role as corporate parents, by giving care leavers access to their personal advisers until the age of 25, and legislating for the publication of local offers to make sure every care leaver knows what help and support they can get.

In reality, many councils have been doing much of this work for some time, and we've included some excellent case studies in this pack to highlight the good work already taking place. Much of the good practice doesn't take a lot of money to implement – it's more about making sure we have the right culture, and understanding what's best for the care leavers in our areas so that we can shape our services, and work with our partners, appropriately.

Our responsibilities don't end when a child leaves care, and getting them right is the best way of making sure we set young people on the right path to a settled, successful and happy adulthood.

**Councillor Richard Watts**

Chair, LGA Children and Young People Board

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# Support for care leavers an introduction

## What is a 'care leaver'?

A care leaver is a young person aged 16-25 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks in total since the age of 14.

Those who are aged 16 or 17 are 'eligible' (still looked after) or 'relevant' (no longer looked after) children. Those aged 18-25 are 'former relevant children'.

The Government has outlined five key outcomes that it wants to achieve for care leavers<sup>1</sup>:

- better preparation and support to live independently
- improved access to education, employment and training
- stability, and to feel safe and secure
- improved access to health support
- financial stability.

Some young people will return home rather than remaining with foster carers or moving on to independent living, but the council still has responsibilities towards them as care leavers.

## Statutory responsibilities

The statutory responsibilities of councils are set out in the Children Act 1989, including through amendments made by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Children and Families Act 2014. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 made additional provisions for care leavers, and outlined in law for the first time what it means for a local authority to be a good corporate parent.

Councils have responsibilities towards care leavers until they are 21, or 25 if they are still in education or training, have a disability or if the care leaver requests continued support.

### Personal advisers and pathway plans

The local authority must complete an 'Assessment of Need' for the young person leaving care, and make sure that a pathway plan is in place by their 16th birthday. A personal adviser (PA) should be appointed to support the young person and implement and monitor the pathway plan; under the Children and Social Work Act 2017, this PA should be available to work with the young person until the age of 25. This duty is expected to be implemented from spring 2018, following consultation on new burdens funding.

It is not unusual for a young person to leave care at 16 years of age, whether to move on to independent living or to return to family or friends. Around 14 per cent leave care at this age, and it is therefore essential that pathway plans are developed in a timely manner, making sure that if a young person is considering leaving care at 16, they know what support is available to them, what their future options are, and have a plan to help them move on to independence successfully.

<sup>1</sup> HM Government, 'Keep On Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence' July 2016

The pathway plan should look at how best to meet the young person's needs to help them effectively make the transition from care to living independently, looking at areas including<sup>2</sup>:

- accommodation
- education and training
- financial support
- support to develop relationships
- life skills
- access to support for health needs, including mental health
- contingency plans for support if independent living breaks down.

The plan also needs to take into account current and previous events in the young person's life so that potential risks can be identified and addressed.

It's important that the plan contains specific actions and deadlines, spelling out exactly who will take what action, and when. The plan should be reviewed at least every six months by a social worker.

### **Financial support**

Care leavers aged 16-18 are entitled to financial support to meet their education, training and employment needs, plus help to pay for things such as accommodation, food and clothing.

Those aged 18-21 are entitled to living expenses associated with living near the place where they work or plan to work, along with help with education and training. Care leavers are entitled to a £1,200 bursary if they stay in full-time education, or £2,000 if they go to university.

Care leavers can also ask the local authority for £2,000 towards setting up home, making sure that they have the equipment and household items they need to set up safe, secure and stable accommodation.

### **Accommodation**

Care leavers must be provided with appropriate accommodation for their needs, which should be discussed as part of the pathway plan well before the young person is due to leave care.

Councils should avoid moving and disrupting young people who are settled, offer a choice of accommodation (where practicable) and provide a support package to go with the accommodation. There should also be a contingency plan in case accommodation arrangements break down.

Any care leaver under 21 who spent at least one night in care when they were 16 or 17 is automatically considered to be in 'priority need' if they become homeless or are at risk of homelessness.<sup>3</sup> From the age of 21, they may also be in priority need if they are vulnerable because they were previously looked after – for example, if they haven't had a stable home since leaving care.

### **Staying in touch**

Councils should attempt to stay in touch with all of their care leavers to monitor progress on their pathway plans, and plans should outline how frequently that contact should take place.

When a care leaver moves to new accommodation, their PA must see them at that accommodation within seven days of the move. After the first subsequent review of the pathway plan, they must visit the care leaver at no less than two-monthly intervals.

In some cases, care leavers may decline the support of the council. This should be respected, however periodic attempts should continue to be made to remain in contact. If a young person's situation changes, they need to know that support is still available, and refusing support once doesn't mean that they have burnt their bridges.

2 Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010, Schedule 1

3 The Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002

### **Staying put**

'Staying put' is an arrangement that allows a looked after child to continue to live with their foster carer – whether a local authority carer or an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) carer – after their 18th birthday, when they cease to be 'looked after' by the local authority. This can take place where the council considers it appropriate, and both the young person and the carer want to enter a staying put arrangement.

The council has a responsibility to monitor the arrangement and provide advice and support (including financial) to the foster parent and the young person to facilitate the arrangement until the young person reaches 21.<sup>4</sup>

### **Staying close**

A number of councils are currently trialling approaches to 'staying close' – a variant of staying put for young people leaving residential care – using funding from the Department for Education's (DfE) Innovation Programme.

The scheme would see care leavers living independently in accommodation close to the children's home, where they would continue to have the support of a key worker from their previous home and could visit the home frequently.

### **Local offer**

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires local authorities to publish a local offer for care leavers. This should include all services offered by the council that can support care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living – both those that the authority is legally obligated to provide, such as 'staying put' and housing support, and universal services such as careers advice or public health services. The offer can also include relevant services provided by other organisations, where appropriate. Care leavers should be consulted before the offer is published. This duty is expected to be implemented in spring 2018.

### **Care leaver covenant**

The Government has committed to introducing a Care Leaver Covenant that will allow charities and private sector businesses, as well as government departments, to set out how they will support care leavers in a way that makes sense to them as an organisation.

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<sup>4</sup> Children Act 1989, Section 23CZA

# Key lines of enquiry for all councillors

## What do we know about our care leavers – both existing, and coming up?

It's important that the council knows as much as possible about care leavers and their needs to make sure that plans can be made to effectively meet those needs. Care leavers are statistically more likely to have special educational needs and disabilities, and are more likely to suffer from mental health problems, than the general population and it is therefore important that sufficient provision is available for those care leavers who need additional support.

But it is also important to treat each young person as an individual. Many care leavers will have no such difficulties and, like many young people, will be focussed on achieving their potential through work, training or higher education. Like any good parent, councils should consider the specific ambitions of individual young people and aim to provide the tailored support they need to fulfil them.

There have been growing numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) entering the country in recent years; if your council is looking after unaccompanied children, they may have very specific needs that must be catered for to help them prepare for and adjust to independent living, whether in the UK or in their home country, and to fulfil their potential.

Nationally, young people are also starting to come into the care system at an older age; the council should know whether this trend applies to its area, and account for this when planning services.

## How are we making sure that the voice of the young person is heard and reflected in the pathway plan?

Pathway plans should include clear, specific actions to drive care leavers' progress, and identify support to help them find and sustain education, training or employment. Different young people will have different ambitions, plans and concerns, so it's vital to make sure pathway plans are very specifically tailored to each young person to help them to develop their independence and meet their goals at a pace that suits them.

Every young person should be fully involved in the development of their pathway plan. Make sure that arrangements are made for this, including in the case of young people placed out of area, those in custody and those who may need support to communicate their needs effectively, for example those with certain learning difficulties or disabilities.

Feedback from care leavers – whether through a care leaver's forum or directly – will be key in identifying whether they feel that their voices are being heard, and what improvements could be made. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) have an important role to play in checking that this has happened and will be able to report on how effectively young people are influencing their pathway plans.

## What are care leavers telling us?

The council should have a variety of methods for obtaining feedback from care leavers, for example care leaver councils or collating information from personal advisers. Regular reports on this information to the corporate parenting panel will help to spot issues early and make sure they're addressed. In particular, the council should assure itself that care leavers feel safe, understand that they have someone they can talk to if there are any problems and that they feel supported and listened to. The proportion of care leavers that the leaving care service is still in touch with should also be monitored – councils should be striving to maintain contact with all care leavers up to the age of at least 21.

## How are we making sure that young people are able to take advantage of 'staying put'?

All young people in foster care should have access to staying put arrangements. Whenever a long term placement is being considered, there should be discussion between the foster carer and the child's social workers about the possibility of it leading to a staying put arrangement – though the young person should not have to decide whether this is something they wish to do until they are ready.

Young people living with IFA carers should also be able to stay put. Make sure that commissioning arrangements with IFAs allow for this possibility; staying put is not a fostering placement, so arrangements will need to be separately negotiated.

Both care leavers and foster carers need access to good information about staying put so that they fully understand the arrangements; make sure that both groups know where they can get the advice they need.

Councils will also need to consider what arrangements are in place for looked-after children who are not in foster care, for example those in residential care, to support them when they have left formal care.

## Do we have a suitable range of accommodation options for care leavers, and how are they supported in each? What happens if something goes wrong?

Different care leavers will have different needs, so there should be a range of accommodation options available to give care leavers the appropriate support. Bed and breakfast accommodation is not considered suitable. While some young people may be able to take on a flat with minimal support from the council, others may need 24/7 access to support. Making sure that options are available to smooth the transition will both increase the chances of a care leaver successfully settling into independent living, and reduce the chances of them becoming homeless.

There will need to be close working between the lead member for housing and the lead member for children, as well as between their respective departments, to make sure that care leavers' accommodation needs are catered for. Councils in two-tier areas will need to develop and maintain strong links with their district councils, who have responsibility for housing, to make sure that the needs of care leavers are being taken into account in housing plans and housing allocation; what arrangements are in place for this, and how well are they working?

Having a fall back option – an emergency place to stay if things go wrong – can be a big comfort to care leavers. Most of us know that if something goes wrong, we've got somewhere to go, and someone who can work through problems with us even if it's not the first time.

Offering this to care leavers reduces the pressure on them, and is part of being a good corporate parent.

Care leavers up to the age of 21 are exempted from recent housing benefit reforms, meaning that they are not limited to the shared accommodation rates as most other young people are. However, there is still significant competition for affordable social and private rented accommodation in many areas. Consideration should be given to how care leavers will access this accommodation, for example through allocation schemes, or identifying particular private landlords to work with personal advisers to provide care leaver accommodation. How are care leavers helped to prepare for when this exemption ends at 21?

## How are we preparing care leavers to live independently?

One of the biggest issues raised by care leavers is that of isolation – without a strong and stable social network, it can be extremely hard to navigate life after leaving care. Some councils are already looking at ways in which they can help care leavers to develop social networks, while efforts to ensure stability of placements and school throughout care are also positive, allowing young people to spend time developing friendships and local connections. Some care leavers find it helpful to be in touch with fellow care leavers; are there opportunities for this in your council?

Practical support to develop life skills will significantly ease the transition for care leavers. In particular, teaching about budgeting will make it easier for young people when they need to start managing their own money, while making sure that children in care are learning to cook healthy meals will help them to look after themselves later on. Encouraging young people to help with household tasks, take on weekend jobs and allowing them increasing independence will all develop important skills to make the move to independent living less daunting.

Some local authorities have given council tax exemptions to care leavers to help them with their budgets as they adjust to living independently, while others have introduced budgeting courses so that care leavers understand what to expect when managing their own tenancy.

Care leavers should also have easy access to key documents that they'll need when taking on tenancies or starting work, for example a birth certificate, National Insurance number, passport and examination certificates.

The duty to produce a local offer for care leavers will be implemented around spring 2018. This will be an important source of information, and it should reflect what care leavers say they need. When this is being developed, find out what care leavers said in the consultation, and what changes were made as a result. How often will the local offer be updated? Having a clear local offer will make it far easier for care leavers to know what's available to help them to live independently.

## How are we working with our partners to support care leavers?

The Government wants to improve access to mental health provision for care leavers, as well as more general improved accountability for the local provision of health services. The NHS has a responsibility alongside councils to act as a corporate parent to care leavers,<sup>5</sup> and should be considering their needs in the development of plans and commissioning of services. Councillors can influence the design and funding of local NHS services through engagement with sustainability and transformation partnerships; your council should be represented on your local partnership through the director of public health or another senior lead.

<sup>5</sup> Children Act 1989 Statutory Guidance: care planning, placement and case review

Joint health and wellbeing strategies are developed by local leaders to enable planning and commissioning of integrated services to meet the needs of the local community, including reducing health inequalities and supporting the needs of vulnerable groups. These plans should include specific consideration of how partners will work together to support care leavers, and the delivery of the strategy should be monitored by the health and wellbeing board. Health scrutiny committees provide further opportunities to look at whether health services for care leavers are sufficient and appropriate.

There will be particular partnership considerations for young people leaving custody, who are at greater risk of becoming homeless, and are likely to have a range of specific needs for support including with employment, training, or mental health. There should be strong joint working relationships and protocols between the leaving care service, the Youth Offending Service and the probation service to start making plans well ahead of a young person's release, and the young person's voice and needs must be at the forefront of planning.

## How do we help care leavers to find, and remain in, employment or further education and training?

While 62 per cent of care leavers aged 19-21 are already in education, employment or training and achieving well, this still leaves a significant minority who are not.<sup>6</sup>

Improvements are being made, for example through the promotion of apprenticeships and further education, but clearly councils have a key role to play in making sure that care leavers have a clear path to follow to live independent lives.

<sup>6</sup> Children's Commissioner 2016: [www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/news/care-leavers-missing-out-important-routes-employment-through-apprenticeships](http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/news/care-leavers-missing-out-important-routes-employment-through-apprenticeships)

Councils have approached this in various ways, from establishing partnerships with local businesses, to encouraging apprenticeship providers to actively consider care leavers, to providing training positions within the local authority. Personal advisers can support young people as they develop their pathway plans to find routes to achieve their goals, including applying for university places or finding jobs or traineeships. Universal careers services should also be involved in supporting care leavers to consider what they want to do after compulsory education has finished.

Bear in mind potential barriers to opportunities – care leavers might worry about where they will stay during university holidays, how they will get to a job outside their town, or whether they can support themselves through an apprenticeship. Check that it's easy to find out about financial and practical support available for all options, and that these are discussed with care leavers well in advance of key decision points.

## Are we being good corporate parents to care leavers?

Being ambitious for young people doesn't stop when they leave care. Find out how many care leavers the council is still in touch with – regular contact with care leavers will help to make sure they are in education, employment or training (or getting support to do so), are managing their money and accommodation well, limiting the risk of homelessness, and that they're looking after their health and wellbeing.

Care leavers also need to know that the council is still ambitious for them, helping them to achieve goals in their pathway plans and working with them so that they can reach their potential.

Every councillor and officer across a local authority has a responsibility as a corporate parent to care leavers. This needs to be acknowledged across all levels of the organisation, and all corporate parents should prioritise the needs of care leavers.

For more information on corporate parenting, please see our 'Corporate parenting resource pack'.

## How are we making sure care leavers have access to services they need for their health and wellbeing?

Care leavers are statistically more likely to need mental health support than young people in the general population because of the trauma and neglect that they may have experienced, so check what arrangements have been put in place to make sure they can get help if they need it. For young people with a need that meets the threshold for CAMHS (child and adolescent mental health services), find out what arrangements are in place for a smooth transition between children and adult services in your authority. Issues that do not meet the CAMHS threshold, for example depression and anxiety, are likely to be treated through public health interventions such as online support, or through provision from GPs. Consider the criteria for access to mental health services; do care leavers receive any priority access, and how are they told about this? The local offer is a good place to signpost to support services, including advising that GPs can help with mental as well as physical health – which some young people may not know.

While the majority of care leavers will have no such problems, the difficulties some have faced in their lives mean that, without proper support, they can be more likely to experience substance misuse problems or teenage pregnancy. A third of young people leaving care report problems with drugs or alcohol within a year<sup>7</sup>, while a quarter of young women leaving care are pregnant, and nearly half become pregnant within two years.<sup>8</sup>

Access to drug and alcohol prevention and treatment services, and sexual health and family planning services, should be well promoted. Data on take up of these services, along with anonymised user feedback, will help to identify whether those services are operating effectively or need to change to meet young people's needs.

All of these issues fall within local authority public health responsibilities. When budgets are being set, consider what services are prioritised, the potential impact on care leavers and make sure you're satisfied that any risks to provision are adequately mitigated. For example, if a drug prevention service is to be reduced, are the remaining sessions in locations and at times that are accessible to care leavers, and will that provision be enough?

Physical health is also important. Care leavers should know who their GP and dentist are and how to make appointments. Support with prescription costs is available for those on certain benefits or on low income – care leavers may need to be made aware of this, and how to fill out prescription forms to ensure they receive this entitlement. Councils might also look at what support they can give to help care leavers look after their health, for example access to leisure centres or support to keep up activities that they started in care.

## Are there particular considerations for unaccompanied asylum seeking care leavers?

The 2016 Immigration Act removes the automatic right to support for an unaccompanied asylum seeking child following their 18th birthday. As they approach their 18th birthday, these young people must apply for extended leave to remain in the UK. This can be an extremely stressful time for young people, and it is important that they are supported through the process.

7 Ibid

8 HM Government, 'Keep On Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence', July 2016

Councils can claim £200 per week to support care leavers who were supported as unaccompanied children and who have leave to remain in the UK. They can also claim this support for care leavers awaiting the outcome of their asylum claim, or who are on their first appeal.

It is important that pathway planning for unaccompanied children takes into account a young person's immigration status; while most unaccompanied children are granted refugee status, humanitarian protection or another form of leave to remain, the decision-making process can be lengthy, leaving the young person in a difficult position to plan ahead. Engagement with the Home Office on asylum claims should be timely, and work on the pathway plan should take into account both a potential future in the UK, or plans to leave the UK and resume life in the young person's home country if they have no lawful basis to remain here.

It should be noted that those awaiting a decision on an asylum claim are not allowed to work. Pathway plans should be clear on the support available to the young person, and to safeguard against potential risks, for example informal work in poor conditions, or modern slavery. The risk of the young person going missing should also be considered when agreeing how often they will be in contact with their personal adviser. For more information, the Local Government Association (LGA) is working with the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner to produce a 'Guide to modern slavery', which will be available in autumn 2017.

The DfE and Home Office are developing revised guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied children, including care leavers without leave to remain. This should expand on existing advice around the need to consider the type of support provided to these care leavers prior to their departure from the UK, for example support from a personal adviser.

# Case studies

## City of York Council

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City of York Council has a strong track record of supporting young people leaving care, a strength highlighted by Ofsted in its report published in February 2017. The inspectors acknowledged that, by listening to care leavers' views and shaping services around them, York now sees the vast majority of care leavers living in accommodation that suits their needs, with low numbers not in education, employment and training, and most making a successful transition to adult life.

This transition starts with developing a pathway plan at the care review nearest the young person's 16th birthday. This gives two years to put the right plan in place – whether that involves staying with a foster family beyond the eighteenth birthday ('staying put') or moving into independent living, and education, training or employment. Each case is referred to a personal adviser (PA) when the young person is 17. PAs generally manage caseloads of around 21, helping them know each young person well and making sure they get the best possible support to experience a smooth transition into the leaving care service.

The pathway team is well connected with information, advice and guidance services and the virtual school, resulting in a proportion of care leavers in education, employment or training that is well above the national average. Two new programmes are being introduced to increase this proportion further, improve career information and support care leavers with learning opportunities.

Teaching life skills is a key element of preparing care leavers to live independently. A pathway life-skills toolkit supports carers and key workers to make sure young people get the right level of help to develop those skills, which include saving money, budgeting and cooking for themselves. Young people are encouraged to remain with their foster carers after their 18th birthdays to continue learning life skills with them as part of the staying put programme, while those in supported housing benefit from personalised support to build their life skills and confidence at a pace that suits them.

Staying put is an option for all care leavers. Those in residential placements outside York are increasingly moved back to the city before their 18th birthdays so that they can take up this option which is part of a strategic initiative to 'Make York Home' for all young people in care. Staying put also includes young people fostered by connected persons or kinship carers, and those placed with independent fostering agencies. Acting on feedback from young people, those who stay put are encouraged to start work, or to get a Saturday job if they are in education, to make life as 'normal' and as like any other family as possible. As one young person commented, "I'm learning to handle money better as I pay board and pay my own phone bills", while another said they enjoyed "feeling part of a family". Those who go to university can return to their foster carer each holiday.

The option of a four-week stay in a 'taster flat' gives care leavers the chance to experience independent living. They know that they have support throughout their stay there as

they develop their life skills before returning to their placement to work on any areas of development and consider what to do next. Accommodation options are varied, to suit different needs. While some care leavers might choose to go into a trainer flat with support from the pathway accommodation officer and pathway worker, others who need more support might opt for supported lodgings with charity SASH or permanently-staffed hostel accommodation, where they have a named key worker and access to daily education sessions and independence skills training. This variety of options allows for gradually increasing independence.

The focus on life skills and a careful transition into accommodation is paying off – the vast majority of care leavers are successfully living independently in suitable accommodation, with none in houses of multiple occupancy. Where there are difficulties, regular risk assessments mean that they are caught early, with creative support packages put in place to help the young person to get back on their feet and move forward. Where care leavers aren't keen to engage and things go wrong, emergency accommodation is also provided – there is always another chance available.

Building a programme of support that genuinely works for care leavers has been helped by social workers and support staff who listen to the views of young people. Care leavers told Ofsted that the council listened carefully, recorded their views well and – importantly – acted upon them. As a result, most were positive about the care and support that they received.

David Purcell, Pathway Team Practice Manager at City of York Council, said: “We’ve made a real effort to learn from our care leavers to make sure that we can give them the best possible transition into adulthood. It’s important that each young person in care can work with us to achieve their ambitions, and can do that at their own pace.

“Every child in York deserves a place they can call home, and to enjoy family life wherever possible – and as the corporate parents to care leavers, that’s what we do our best to give them.”

For more information, please contact: [david.purcell@york.gov.uk](mailto:david.purcell@york.gov.uk)

## Royal Borough of Greenwich

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The Royal Borough of Greenwich has been working with charity MyBnk to make sure care leavers get good quality financial education to help them when they move into independent accommodation. Care leavers moving on to supported housing all attend the week-long accredited 'Money House' programme as part of their pathway, spending a week with other young people in a real flat learning about everything from tenancy agreements and safe borrowing to budgeting and choosing utility providers.

Referrals are all considered individually to make sure needs are understood and catered for on the course, and the young people are all contacted to sort out logistics to make sure they can attend.

The results of its first year are impressive:

- 97 per cent felt more confident about their financial situation
- attendees are three times less likely to have rent arrear issues than their peers
- no one who has completed the training has been evicted
- 90 per cent of those who felt their ability to pay rent and keep their tenancy was below average or poor felt that this improved as a result of the course, with 80 per cent going on to rate their ability as good or excellent.

Annetta Corbin, Family and Young People Service Manager at Greenwich Council said: "Money management is a vital skill for young people when they move into their own accommodation, and we know from our care leavers that the better the support they receive to build these skills, the more confident they feel about making that move. Feedback from our care leavers on the programme has been really positive, and we've found that those who have been on the course are much more likely to maintain their tenancies when they move on to independent accommodation."

For more information, visit:

**<http://mybnk.org/programmes/financial-education-the-money-house>**

\*The Money House has now expanded to Newham and is funded by the JPMorgan Chase Foundation, Berkeley Foundation and Hyde Housing.

## Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

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Leaders at Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council were delighted when their latest Ofsted inspection found the experience and progress of care leavers to be outstanding.

The council's Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Councillor Ann McCoy, said: "We've worked incredibly hard at Stockton-on-Tees to make sure that care leavers get the personalised, joined-up support they need to meet our high aspirations for them. We've embedded the importance of supporting care leavers both across the council and with our partners to make sure each young person can access the right services for them as they move towards independence."

The council-wide integrated support service for children and young people, Youth Direction, is central to the council's support for care leavers. It brings together a wide range of services, including independent careers advice, the virtual school and the Youth Offending Team, which work together to support young people leaving care in a coherent, joined up way. Two dedicated, part-time advisers for looked-after children and care leavers help to coordinate this work. As a result of timely, targeted, multi-agency interventions, a higher-than-average proportion of care leavers move on to education, employment or training.

Close links have been developed between the leaving care service, the transitions worker for children with disabilities and adult services to make sure that when young people are moving on from care, they are well aware of their entitlements and extra help available, and can make a smooth transition to working with adult services.

The council also works closely with external partners to help care leavers achieve their ambitions, including strong partnerships with local and regional universities to support bespoke university visits, taster sessions and individual support for young people considering or capable of moving on to higher education. A joint understanding between the council and the NHS of the importance of timely support for care leavers' mental health needs means that there is dedicated support from CAMHS; care leaver appointments are prioritised, and they are seen within a week.

A multi-agency partnership for looked-after children and care leavers also makes sure that everyone involved in services for care leavers is held to account – whether that's the care leaver team being accountable for young people's outcomes, or the council's senior management being challenged on improvements needed across the whole council. This partnership challenge works well, with a recent council-wide vision for improvement being approved to increase apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers within the authority.

For more information, please contact: [martin.gray@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:martin.gray@stockton.gov.uk)

It isn't unusual for a young person to have goals that might seem unachievable – but as corporate parents, it's important that councils put the views and wishes of care leavers at the heart of their plans, and work with them to progress towards their goals while keeping alternatives in mind.

At the age of 16, Rob was in the care of Hampshire Children's Services. He didn't engage in education, was using alcohol and was working with the Youth Offending Team following an assault charge. He did, however, show a flair for boxing, continuing to attend training even as he failed to show up for education or work. His hobby was supported by his foster carers, social worker and personal adviser, who worked with him on a pathway plan that allowed him to follow his ambition to become a professional boxer, while encouraging him to take up opportunities with local colleges as alternative options.

As Rob started to win more local and UK title fights, his drive and commitment so impressed the children's services team that they sought out ways to acknowledge and reward his progress and encourage him further, as any good parent would do. This included helping with travel costs to fights, allowing him to travel abroad to a training school for a month, and then supporting him when he took the decision to move abroad to embark on a professional boxing career. This included supporting him with a weekly allowance, and sending goods to help him set up home.

When Rob showed a desire to further his own education by learning the language of the country he competed in most frequently, Hampshire helped him to pay for a language course; his dedication to learning means he is now fluent in that second language.

Thanks to the flexibility, support and encouragement offered by Hampshire Children's Services and everyone else working with Rob, he is now a professional boxer who no longer drinks or smokes, and is living a successful, independent life.

For more information, please contact: [cathi.hadley@hants.gov.uk](mailto:cathi.hadley@hants.gov.uk)

Listening to your care leavers is the perfect way to find out what can really make a difference to them – and it isn't always complicated. In Trafford, the care leavers' forum highlighted that their £57.10 per week benefit had one key problem – it left £7.10 each week that couldn't be withdrawn from the cash point. The point was raised with councillors, who agreed that raising the benefit to £60, which could be withdrawn in £10 denominations, made far more sense; they also noted that the extra £2.90 could pay for two day's gas in a young person's flat, or cover a chip supper treat. Care leavers were delighted with the response, which showed that they were genuinely listened to and that their corporate parents cared about their lived experiences.

When a care leaver raised with Trafford Council that it didn't feel fair for him to search for work or training while his fellow care leavers could still get their benefits without making the same effort, the council decided that the importance of getting care leavers into education, employment or training made it worth providing an incentive. The Corporate Parenting Board agreed an incentive of up to £30 a week for care leavers who were actively engaging – which could cover anything from work experience, to visiting a job centre, to working with their personal adviser. They could also get a free weekly bus pass to help them carry out these activities. The overall package was worth over £100 to care leavers who actively worked towards improving their own outcomes, and has proven extremely popular. Seventy per cent of Trafford care leavers are now in education, employment and training – higher than the national average, and a positive indicator around how care leavers are supported by the council.

For more information, please contact: [aftercare@trafford.gov.uk](mailto:aftercare@trafford.gov.uk)

## London Borough of Islington

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Islington's leaving care service, Independent Futures, works with care leavers and 16 and 17-year-olds in care to provide a holistic service that prepares and supports them as they move towards independent living. They've sought out innovative ways to help care leavers to make sure they're in a strong position when they leave care – from establishing support networks, to providing mental health support, and helping with finding further education and employment.

A key concern of young people when they leave care is around the support networks they'll have when they're no longer 'looked after'. The Grand Mentoring Scheme pairs care leavers with a 'grandparent' who mentors the young person, and provides support and guidance as they move into adult life. This gives them someone independent from the council that they can rely on for help, and who they can build a stable relationship with as they take on greater independence.

Independent Futures has also teamed up with a wide range of local partners from the public, private and charity sectors to give care leavers access to employment and training opportunities, along with support from King's College to help those who hope to go to university. The variety of partners reflects the range of young people looked after by the council, providing a broad spectrum of possibilities to show them how much is possible. The council also works closely with partners in the arts and performance sector to give young people a way to develop their sense of identity and personal achievement, promoting the confidence and resilience that they'll need as they move into work, as well as raising aspirations.

Supporting the physical and mental health and wellbeing of care leavers is paramount. Well-used weekly drop in health sessions make sure care leavers can get advice when they need it, while free counselling and advice commissioned from a local mental health charity allows them to get support quickly if they find themselves struggling with mental health difficulties. Regular liaison between CAMHS and adult mental health services ensures continuity of provision for those care leavers who have specific emotional health needs. Where young people need to visit specialists, young people's advisers offer to attend with them for moral support and to make sure they can attend the appointment.

Councillor Joe Caluori, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families, said: "We're very proud of the work that we do in Islington to support young people in our care, and there's no reason for that to stop when they become care leavers. We know they face a wide range of challenges when they leave care, so we try to provide the right support for each young person as an individual, alongside our universal care leaver offer which includes an exemption from paying council tax for any care leaver – from any council area – living in Islington until they are 25."

For more information, please contact: [childrens.services@islington.gov.uk](mailto:childrens.services@islington.gov.uk)

When Ofsted rated support for care leavers at East Riding of Yorkshire Council as 'outstanding', it confirmed one of the pathway team's core beliefs – that getting the basics right, and really understanding what works, are key to making sure that care leavers have a positive experience and make good progress.

Staff working with care leavers know the importance of stability and relationships to children in care, so the pathway team starts working with them in Year 11 to carefully manage the transition from looked-after child to care leaver. Care leavers also work with several members of the team to make sure there is always someone who they can talk to, and who knows them well enough to provide the right kind of support.

Each member of the pathway team has an average caseload of 15, giving them the time to dedicate to each care leaver, while managers work hard to make sure staff have all they need to do the best possible job. This includes an excellent range of training to cover the types of issues young people may face, including the dangers of radicalisation and self-harm.

East Riding has also set up a Post 16 sub-group of the virtual school to make sure care leavers' needs are being met and to raise aspirations among both the young people and the service providers. The group is chaired by the pathway team manager, and includes further education colleges, training providers and Jobcentre Plus. Care leavers are given highly supportive mentoring and specialist advice about their potential options as they progress into further or higher education, training or employment. This strong partnership working at all levels has led to the authority having 69 per cent of care leavers engaged in education, employment or training, higher than similar authorities and the national average.

Pathway Team Manager Sue Smyth said: "One of the most important things that we do is to gain care leavers' trust, and show them that we'll support them, no matter what. We're always keen to try new ideas, but we make sure those basic relationships and core support are never compromised, because they're the foundations for a strong service. Our care leavers tell us that they feel safe, and that they wouldn't be where they are now without our support – and that's the most important thing for all of us."

For more information, please contact Sue Smyth: [www.eastriding.gov.uk](http://www.eastriding.gov.uk)

# Key resources and further reading

Barnardo's and St Basil's **Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework**, 2015  
[www.stbasils.org.uk/files/2015-10-40/16905SUCareleaversaccommandsupportframeworkLRv2.pdf](http://www.stbasils.org.uk/files/2015-10-40/16905SUCareleaversaccommandsupportframeworkLRv2.pdf)

Department for Education, **Children Act 1989 Statutory Guidance: Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers**, October 2010 (updated January 2015)  
[www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-transition-to-adulthood-for-care-leavers](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-transition-to-adulthood-for-care-leavers)

Department for Education, Department for Work and Pensions, and HM Revenue and Customs, **Staying Put Guidance**, May 2013  
[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/201015/Staying\\_Put\\_Guidance.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/201015/Staying_Put_Guidance.pdf)

HM Government, **Keep On Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence**, July 2016  
[www.gov.uk/government/publications/keep-on-caring-supporting-young-people-from-care-to-independence](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keep-on-caring-supporting-young-people-from-care-to-independence)

The Children's Partnership, **Staying Put: Good Practice Guidance**, 2014  
[http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw\\_113930-2.pdf](http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw_113930-2.pdf)







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