

Corporate Parenting Panel

26 February 2021

Care Leavers' Strategy – Annual report



Report of Helen Fergusson, Head of Children's Social Care, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To update Corporate Parenting Panel on progress against the objectives set out in the Care Leavers' Strategy 2019 to 2023.
- 2 To provide a refreshed and updated Care Leavers' Strategy for 2021 (appendix 2).
- 3 To provide a Care Leavers Action Plan for 2021 (appendix 3).

Executive summary

- 4 The Care Leavers Strategy has been in place for a number of years now and it is recognised that it will need a full re-write in 2021.
- 5 Although there has been less progress against the strategic priorities this year due to the impact of COVID-19, performance against a number of strategic priorities has remained strong.
- 6 The action plan sets out a number of strategic priorities and associated actions to be completed over the course of 2021, aimed at improving outcomes for care leavers.

Recommendation

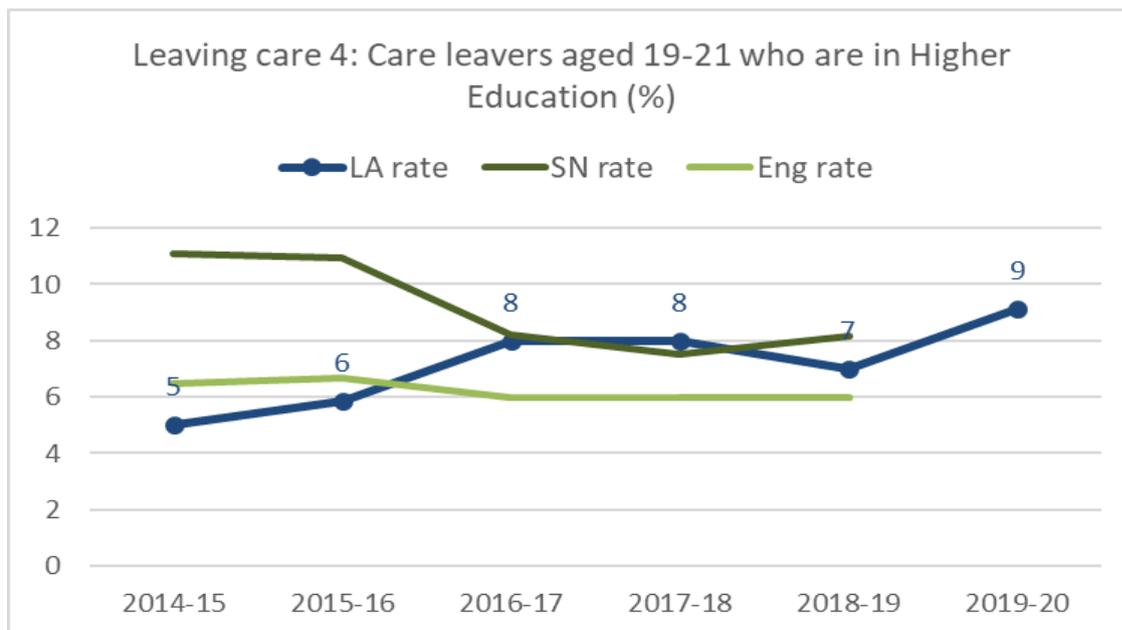
- 7 Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to:
 - (a) Receive this report and the updated care leavers strategy and care leavers action plan.

Background

- 8 The original Care Leavers Strategy was written in 2015. In 2019 the strategy was updated to reflect changes in legislation and practice, but it remains fundamentally the same as the 2015 strategy.
- 9 This updated version of the strategy will be fully and re-written, and a new Action Plan agreed, in November 2021.
- 10 As of October 2020, Durham was responsible for 381 care leavers. Of these, 248 care leavers were receiving an active service from the Young People's Service, and either had a social worker or a Young Person's Advisor (YPA). The remaining 133 care leavers were what is referred to as 'In Monitoring', which relates to older care leavers who choose not to have active involvement with the service but can access support from the Young People's Service at any time. The service has a responsibility to keep in contact with these young people at intervals of no less than twice a year. If a young person requires any additional support, they will be allocated a Young Peoples Advisor.

Progress against Objectives in Care Leavers Strategy 2019 - 2023

- 11 The previous Action Plan was devised for 2017 – 2021, therefore is not in line with the timescales for the current strategy. Many of the original objectives have been achieved, and others are no longer relevant.
- 12 As of December 2020, Durham's performance on most of the key indicators of outcomes for care leavers, such as suitable accommodation, remains strong, despite the impact of Covid.
- 13 For example, in relation to accommodation of care leavers, throughout 2019/20 the Young People's Service continued to work with Housing colleagues to develop a range of accommodation options for care leavers, including Hedley House and the Durham Lettings Agency.
- 14 As of December 2020, 88% of 17 and 18 year olds and 95% of 19 to 21 years olds were in suitable accommodation. This included 18 18 to 20 year olds in a 'staying put' arrangement with their former foster carers at the end of 2019/20. We also have an additional 18 young people living in Supported Lodgings 'staying put' with former carers.
- 15 Likewise, Durham's performance in relation to participation of care leavers is in line with or above that of our comparators, with 70% of 17 and 18 year olds and 65% of 19 to 21 year olds in education, employment and training at the end of 2020.
- 16 We are particularly proud to report that we currently have 30 young people at University or other higher education establishments.



- 17 The Local Offer now includes an additional winter fuel allowance for care leavers with low incomes.
- 18 The mental health of our care leavers continues to be a key priority, particularly in relation to the impact of Covid. The Full Circle Therapeutic service now works in a trauma-informed way with 18 to 21 year olds as well as younger care leavers.

Future Developments

- 19 We will involve care leavers in developing support services, group sessions and drop-ins at the new Care Leavers hub, from April 2021.
- 20 We are rolling out the use of the ClearCut Communication tool to assist us in understanding the communication needs of care leavers. Staff will be trained to use the tool from April 2021 onwards.
- 21 We will extend the current offer provided at Hedley House, based on the findings at the 6-month review stage, developing two dispersed supported living properties with outreach support, in line with our increasing care leaver numbers.
- 22 In addition to the use of Staying Put, the Young People's Service, in conjunction with Residential Services, will develop a Staying Close pilot. This will enable young people to continue to receive support from the staff they know after they leave children's homes within County Durham.
- 23 We will continue to work to improve the quality of pathway plans, fully involving young people in developing their plans.

- 24 We will review and update the independence and life skills programme for care leavers.
- 25 We will work with health colleagues to ensure that all care leavers aged 15 + are offered a Health Passport.
- 26 To increase employment options, we are developing sessional work opportunities across Durham County Council and are exploring how to increase positive action in relation to care leavers within the County Council's Recruitment Policy.

Conclusion

- 27 Despite the challenging circumstances resulting from the Covid pandemic, efforts are continuing to expand opportunities for care leavers to achieve positive outcomes and realise their potential.

Author

Helen Fergusson Helen.Fergusson@durham.gov.uk

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Services for care leavers are subject to legislation and statutory guidance

Finance

None

Consultation

None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

The Care Leavers' strategy is inclusive of young people in all protected groups

Climate Change

No impact

Human Rights

The Strategy promotes the rights of care leavers

Crime and Disorder

The Strategy includes consideration of Youth Justice implications

Staffing

None.

Accommodation

None

Risk

None

Procurement

None

Appendix 2: Care Leavers' Strategy for 2021

Attached as a separate document

Appendix 3: Care Leavers Action Plan for 2021

Attached as a separate document