

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

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report has been prepared to provide a strategy for the ambition and delivery of services for young people who have been in the care of Durham children’s services.
- 2 The strategy report and action plan are attached at Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

Executive summary

- 3 Services for young people who have been in the care of Durham children’s services are increasingly co-produced with the young people who receive the support. This is identified as the most effective way of establishing accountable services to meet need.
- 4 The Local Authority is required to provide a clear offer of services to Care Leavers and this is done nationally using the Local Offer to Care Leavers. In the development of this report a group of care leavers met to evaluate Durham’s local offer against others nationally. This resulted in the development of the action plan with young people’s priorities at the heart of the work.
- 5 The development of a group of young people who are care leavers to operate as a scrutiny committee to drive the priorities and progress of work in the service is a key activity to continue to progress with co-produced services.

Recommendation

- 6 Member of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to note the contents of this report

Background

- 7 Care Leaver eligibility is determined on the basis of the young person's care status and is as follows.
- 8 **Relevant Child:** A 'relevant child' can include those who have been detained through the criminal justice system or were in hospital on their 16th birthday.
- 9 If a 'relevant child' has returned home to their parents, they cease to be a relevant child after being at home for 6 months. However, if this arrangement later breaks down before their 18th birthday, they return to being a 'relevant child'.
- 10 If a young person has experienced a series of pre-planned respite arrangements, not lasting longer than 4 weeks, each of these will not be considered as qualifying towards 'relevant child' status. However, if a young person receives respite care on a regular basis, this may amount to the young person being classed as a 'relevant child'; the Local Authority's policy will need to be considered to determine this.
- 11 **Former Relevant Child:** If, at the age of 21, the young person is still being helped by the responsible Authority with education or training, then they remain a 'former relevant child' until a maximum age of 25. Their programme of education or training will be set out within their Pathway Plan.
- 12 Former relevant children are no longer dependent upon the Local Authority for income and housing costs. They can obtain benefits in their own right. If they become homeless at the age of 18, 19 or 20, they will automatically be seen as being a priority need. If they become homeless at the age of 21 or over, they will need to be assessed to establish whether they are vulnerable.
- 13 **Qualifying Care Leaver:** This category also includes previously 'looked after' children aged 16 to 20, who ceased to be 'looked after' on the making of a Special Guardianship Order, and:
 - (a) are either still being cared for under the Special Guardianship Order (16 or 17 year olds); *or*
 - (b) the Order remained in force until they reached 18.
- 14 The young people who form the care leaver population are children who were unable to safely remain living within their families. The children who

come into our care do so because they have suffered loss and/or harm. They need to be supported by all the adults in their lives to understand what has happened in a way that makes sure they do not assume blame or shame for what has happened. As a result of the challenges the children in our care have faced, we need to be assured that being in our care makes things better for them. Using the experiences of care leavers to inform our planning and hold us to account provides us with the opportunity to best meet their needs.

- 15 Our care leavers have amazing talents and skills, and it is our role to help them to explore these. We do this best when we will provide an environment that supports each young person to feel loved and confident to learn and to make mistakes. We want our care leavers to feel able to have all the opportunities their friends have, without being concerned that they have been in our care. In doing this we work with all the services that are in contact with care leavers to seek to remove any barriers or prejudices them.
- 16 We provide a range of services to meet assessed needs, including accommodation, education, employment and training which reflects the needs of individual young people.
- 17 We provide a dedicated service to care leavers as young adults. Every care leaver who wants to have a named Young Person's Advisor who helps them to produce a plan focused on their ambitions and dreams and works alongside the young person to achieve the steps along the way. Services are in place until the young person is 25 and young people can contact the service to request advice and support.

Conclusion

- 18 Corporate Parenting Panel are requested to provide comment on the Care Leaver Strategy which provides oversight of the ambition and work of the care leaver service with the priorities for the year ahead.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The services to Care leavers in Durham are monitored and reported through the work of Corporate Parenting Panel.

Finance

There are cost implications for design and print services, however the Care leavers Strategy Report will primarily be shared by email, on the Local Offer to Care Leavers and Durham County Council websites to minimise printing and distribution costs.

Consultation

Young people from the Children in Care Council have been involved in the development of the Strategy Report. The consultation has been done in the main through virtual meetings coordinated by Investing in Children, due to the Coronavirus pandemic and lockdown restrictions.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Care leaving and Looked After Services are available to all children and young people in line with legal duties.

Climate Change

There are no climate change implications

Human Rights

Children and young people have been central to the development of the Report to ensure that their voices are heard.

Crime and Disorder

There are no crime and disorder implications.

Staffing

There are no staffing implications.

Accommodation

There are no accommodation implications.

Risk

There are no risk implications.

Procurement

There are no procurement implications.

Appendix 2: Care Leaver's Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers

Attached as a separate document

Appendix 3: Care Leavers Service Action Plan

Attached as a separate document