

## Corporate Parenting Panel

19 April 2024

## Care Leavers Strategy and Action Plan Progress Report



### Report of Rachel Farnham, Head of Children's Social Care, Children and Young People's Service, DCC

#### Electoral division(s) affected:

None.

#### Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report outlines the progress of the Care Leavers Service Action Plan and Strategy.

#### Executive summary

- 2 The Children Act 1989 places duties on Local Authorities towards 'looked after' and previously 'looked after' children as they exit the care system. The service to young people who have been in the care of Durham Children's services is delivered to all young people aged between 16 and 25 who fall within the eligibility criteria. This criterion includes:
  - (a) eligible child, who is a child aged 16 or 17 and is currently Looked After or has been looked after by the Local Authority for 13 weeks since the age of 14;
  - (b) relevant child, who is a child aged 16 or 17 who has been Looked After for 13 weeks since the aged of 14 or who has been looked after since the age of 16 but is no longer Looked After;
  - (c) former relevant child, who is a young person aged 18-25 who has been an eligible or relevant child prior to becoming 18;
  - (d) **Or other qualifying care leavers**, who is young person who was Looked After for a period of less than 13 weeks since the age of 14 or was Looked After since the age of 16.

#### Recommendation

- 3 Members of Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to:
  - (a) Note the content of this report.

## **Background**

- 4 The offer from the leaving Care service is published in the Local Offer to Care Leavers which provides details of how support will be provided to young people with regards to:
  - (a) Where young people live; this includes all options, staying put, supporting lodgings, supported accommodation, living alone and university accommodation as well as advice to avoid homelessness and support for any housing issues;
  - (b) Money: help with managing money, help with benefits, setting up home money, and all other types of financial advice;
  - (c) Looking After themselves; Physical and emotional health advice and support, sexual health, drug and alcohol support, domestic abuse and healthy relationship advice, someone to talk to, smoking cessation and opportunities to get involved in things;
  - (d) Education employment and training; advice when thinking about leaving school, sixth form or college, work experience and part time jobs, learning to drive, apprenticeships or traineeships, going to university, getting a job.

## **Care Leavers Action Plan**

- 5 Co-production of the Care Leavers action plan was identified as an essential aspect of the planning and a group of young people met to assess the Durham County Council Local Offer to Care Leavers against national Local Offers and to develop the renewed action plan for 2023/2024.
- 6 The action plan produced includes several areas of focus. The progress of these is recorded in detail in the plan but include:
  - (a) Pathway Plans and pathway plans needs assessments;
  - (b) Education, Employment, and training;
  - (c) Suitable accommodation;
  - (d) Improved health outcomes;
  - (e) Preparation for adulthood;
  - (f) Co-production.

The attached presentation (Appendix 2) provides a summary of progress in all key areas and next steps to continue to develop the service.

It is of note, a focussed visit was undertaken by OFSTED to assess the effectiveness of Durham County Council's services to Care Experienced Young People in November 2023. In respect of the above areas, OFSTED summarised:

*'The local authority's offer to care-experienced young people is clear and accessible. Care-experienced young people contributed to the development of the offer and fully understand what support is available to them.'*

*Leaders have a commitment to revisiting the offer regularly to ensure that all care leavers have access to the support they need regardless of their personal circumstances.'*

*As a corporate parent, the local authority is diligent in its efforts to ensure that care experienced young people are given the opportunity to achieve their goals and they are ambitious for their futures'.*

## **Continued Learning**

- 7 Durham County Council care leavers service is now an established member of the regional board for care leavers and we are committed to working with our partners to ensure that all care experienced young people have parity across the region and explore all areas of best practice. In addition, the Care Leavers service is represented nationally on forums to develop the service further and the work from this will be shared in future updates.
- 8 The service has fulfilled the commitment to the development of a Care experienced scrutiny group. The Experts through Experience Group has undertaken their first scrutiny area and will report the findings to Corporate Parenting Panel as a group.

## **Conclusion**

- 9 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel will have an oversight and understanding of the Care Leaver Service and will be aware of the continuous developments within the service to ensure we strive to meet the needs of young people.

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

We are bound by duties under the Children & Social Work Act / Children's Act to act in the best interests of children and young people.

### **Finance**

Any future development within the care leavers offer will require appropriate financial scrutiny the current report does not have any financial implications.

### **Consultation and Engagement**

The strategy was developed with young people and they were engaged appropriately to ensure the priorities were representative of the needs and priorities for care experienced young people.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

The Young People's Service provides care and support to young people who identify as transgender, this forms 1% of the overall service group.

### **Climate Change**

No implications.

### **Human Rights**

Children and young people have access to the Durham County Council complaints process.

### **Crime and Disorder**

No implications.

### **Staffing**

The authority has a statutory duty to provide personal advisors to care experienced young people.

### **Accommodation**

Should children and young people come into the care of the Local Authority, there is a need to ensure there is sufficient suitable placements.

**Risk**

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide support to care experienced young people up to the age of 25. Non-compliance with this would result in the Local Authority not meeting its legislative requirements and risk young people being exposed to harm without appropriate assessment and support.

**Procurement.**

None.