

**Wiltshire Council**

**Full Council**

**16th October 2018**

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**Subject: Care leavers: A Local Offer**

**Cabinet member: Laura Mayes, Cabinet Member for Children and Education**

**Key Decision: No**

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### **Executive Summary**

Following the implementation of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 our duties and responsibilities to care leavers have been extended. Specifically, Local Authorities in England must publish a Local Offer for care leavers, providing information about services which the local authority offers that may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living. This includes services relating to health and well-being; relationships; education and training; employment; accommodation; participation in society.

This paper outlines the process undertaken to build the Local Offer and the details of the Local Offer for care leavers in Wiltshire.

### **Proposals**

That Full Council endorse the Local Offer for care leavers in Wiltshire.

### **Reasons for Proposals**

To ensure we meet the legal duty as required by the Children and Family Act 2017 which provides clear commitment to the Council's Corporate parenting responsibilities and ambition for our care leavers.

**Terence Herbert**  
**Corporate Director**

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### Purpose of Report

1. To provide Council with an overview of the new duties and responsibilities to care leavers arising from the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

### Background

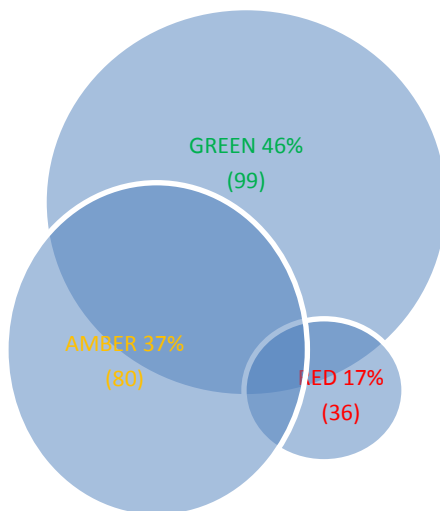
2. Following the implementation of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 our duties and responsibilities to care leavers have been extended. Specifically, Local Authorities in England must publish a Local Offer for care leavers, providing information about services which the local authority offers that may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living. This includes services relating to health and well-being; relationships; education and training; employment; accommodation; participation in society.

Underpinning principles within the Children and Social Work Act 2017:

- Introduces corporate parenting principles to which local authorities must have regard. Through Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) we have reviewed the requirements of the Act and are reassured that our revised Corporate Parenting Strategy already meets the requirements of the Act. CPP will continue to review the effectiveness of this strategy and strengthen it where required.
- **Local authorities in England must publish a Local Offer for care leavers, providing information about services which the local authority offers that may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living. This includes services relating to health and well-being; relationships; education and training; employment; accommodation; participation in society.** This report will provide details of what we plan to include within the Wiltshire Offer.
- Extension of local authority support to Care leavers to age 25, including provision of Personal Advisers, assessment of the needs of former relevant children and preparation of a Pathway Plan.
- Educational achievement of previously looked after children. Local authorities in England must make advice and information available for the purpose of promoting the educational achievement of previously looked after children educated in their area, and must appoint at least one person for the purpose of discharging that duty; schools must designate a member of the staff as having responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of previously looked after children. This is a priority for the Virtual School with the Virtual School Head taking lead responsibility. The Virtual School Board of Governors is aware of this new responsibility.

## Wiltshire Care Leaver Population

3. Currently in Wiltshire there are 215 care leavers, the majority of these (165) are aged between 19 and 21 years.
4. Services to care leavers are provided by the two Children in Care Teams. Children in Care are allocated a Personal Advisor when they reach 15 ½ years, the PA will work alongside the child's social worker to support the child and develop a Pathway Plan. From the age of 18 the social worker will transfer the case to a PA who then becomes the lead professional.
5. We undertake a regular screen on individual care leavers. The screen has been developed by Barnardos to support service development, it provides a RAG rating across domains including accommodation, mental health, education, employment and social inclusion.



Young people can move through each section / colour depending on their level of stability. Significant events have an impact on this, depending on the outcome for the young person. Crisis events tend to see them move into red, their ability to cope with crisis and significant events affects their stability. This impacts on a worker's priorities.

## Correlation analysis

6. Green / stable cases have a strong correlation with a long term stable placement through their care career or towards the end. These young people enjoyed good attachments and relationships with carers, they are particularly well engaged in education or training. Common features include:
  - integrated family life in an excellent foster placement
  - doing very well in GCSEs or at collage
  - continues to make excellent progress and is working at or above expected progress
  - SATS better than expected
  - higher education an ambition
  - employed
  - has her own tenancy
  - described as gifted and talented
7. Amber cases have likely experienced several temporary placements, are less likely be in education or employment, are more difficult to engage and more likely to have mental health issues. Emotional and behavioural development is of concern. Common features include:
  - history of self-harm
  - exclusions
  - NEET
  - SEND

- hasn't received any formal education (UASC – unaccompanied asylum seeking children)
  - disengaged
8. Red cases have a strong correlation with those who have had several placements in different areas, including out of county placements, complex mental health needs, NEET, traumatic childhoods and journey through care. Common features include:
- history of domestic abuse, affecting self esteem
  - inability to form attachments and have meaningful relationships
  - at risk of CSE
  - sexualised behaviour
  - delayed development
  - homeless
  - suicidal tendencies and self-harm and ongoing emotional concerns

### **Extending Personal Adviser Support to All Care Leavers to Age 25**

9. The new duty that extends Personal Adviser (PA) support to all care leavers means that the local authority continues to exercise functions in respect of the care leaver to age 25 and should therefore apply the corporate parenting principles when exercising those functions. Each care leaver will reach the point at which they can live successful and independent lives at a different age and there is no assumption in the Act that all care leavers will require statutory support until age 25.
10. The relevant guidance makes it clear that although each individual case will be different, in broad terms, it is appropriate for support for care leavers to taper away over time, in recognition of their growing maturity and independence. This is borne out by our own local analysis.
11. For care leavers aged 21 or over, the duties in the Children Act 1989 and those introduced through the Children & Social Work Act – to assess care leavers' needs, and develop and keep under review a pathway plan – apply only where the young person requests support.
12. The new duty therefore means that local authorities do not necessarily need to provide the same level of support to care leavers aged 21 to 25 as it does for those aged 18-20. The new duty does however will enable us to be proactive and remain aspirational for all our leavers up to 25. This will be an offer for all until 25 and will be particularly important for those who may be continuing to struggle with the transition to independence and adult life. Our approach recognises care leavers growing stability and maturity between age 21 and 25, during which many care leavers are able to lead successful lives and may choose not to access PA support or continue contact with their local authority but the offer is there if requested or required.
13. The new duty to extend PA support to all care leavers up to age 25 means that they will be able to continue to receive support when they reach age 21, or to request PA support at any point after age 21 up to age 25, even if they had previously indicated that they did not want it. The PA should provide support for as long as that issue remains and address any new issues if they arise. But if the young person does not want or require support on an ongoing basis, the case can remain inactive until the care leaver makes another request for support.
14. Analysis indicates the need to prepare to provide a service to an additional 43 young people in the first year, with growth likely to increase thereafter. In order to meet this demand a further two PA posts have been added and recruited to the structure.

## **Building the Care Leaver Offer**

15. Two cross-council Heads of Service meetings took place to identify relevant resources and services to care leavers. The CiC Council reviewed the local offer provided by North Somerset (an exemplar in the consultation documents) and were asked to comment on what they would like to see in a Wiltshire local offer. The Personal Advisers undertook a similar exercise.
16. Broad cross-Council commitment has been achieved both at senior level as evidenced in the Business Plan and at operational level through consultation with Heads of Service. Reports have also been presented to the Looked After Children Improvement Group, Performance and Outcomes Board, Health and Well-being Group and Public Service Board.
17. Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) was consulted on 13 March and asked whether they supported the developments outlined in the draft offer. CPP gave positive feedback and indicated that they agreed with priorities identified.
18. On 19th June 2018, Children Select Committee resolved to endorse the main elements included with the draft local offer to care leavers, details of which are outlined below. Children's Select identified additional areas for consideration which have or are currently being explored and may be added to the Care Leaver Offer in due course. This includes a commitment to explore the creation of a funded Wi-Fi package for care leavers through the Wiltshire Digital Strategy.

## **The Local Offer**

### **Accommodation**

#### **Priority Banding through Homes for Wiltshire**

19. This has been secured and demonstrates a clear commitment from the council to ensure that care leaver's accommodation needs are treated as a priority.

#### **Young People's Accommodation Officer**

20. We continue to fund a designated young person's and care leavers accommodation officer to act as the initial point of contact and 'trouble shooter' for care leavers. There have been positive outcomes both strategically and operationally.

#### **Supported Housing Pilot**

21. A pilot in partnership with Housing has been agreed. Three two-bedroom flats have been identified from existing council stock in the Salisbury area and made available for the pilot. The flats are furnished to a good standard, bedrooms are sound-proofed and tenants receive a secure tenancy. Rent has been capped at or near to Housing Benefit levels, this includes maintenance costs. Support is provided Personal Advisors. We will use the pilot success to illustrate to housing associations that the model is effective and encourage similar schemes to be developed across Wiltshire. We do not have any Council stock in this area at this time but will continue to work with housing colleagues to progress matters.

#### **Local connection agreed for Wiltshire Care leavers placed/living Outside of Wiltshire**

22. This enables any Wiltshire Care Leaver who has been previously placed outside of the county to bid on properties through Homes for Wiltshire or to access the supported

housing pilot. This is a very positive outcome and many authorities have not achieved this.

### **Rent Guarantee scheme**

23. We offer to act as a rent guarantor to care leavers where they have a sufficient income to cover rent and associated living expenses. Legal services will review each agreement to ensure Council liability is limited. Currently we act as rent guarantors to 10 care leavers, the majority are attending university. If this is not an option we would support with alternative accommodation options.

### **Work/Independence**

#### **Dedicated support through Building Bridges Programme to support young people into work**

24. Building Bridges is the Swindon and Wiltshire implementation of the nationwide Building Better Opportunities project. The programme is funded jointly through the Big Lottery Fund and European Social Fund, with funding secured through to 2019. Applications to Building Bridges is made via the Personal Advisers, referrals rates are scrutinised by the Looked After Children and Care leavers Employment Pathway Steering Group. Building Bridges work with people over the age of 15. There is a group of partners identified to focus on the theme of reduction in NEET.

#### 25. Participant Eligibility:

- a. Not working (Working less than 1 hour each week or not working at all. Can be registered or unregistered unemployed or not on benefits at all.)
- b. Have the legal right to work in the UK (Either through citizenship, registered refugee status or other legal right. Not asylum seekers.)
- c. Currently live in or close to Wiltshire area
- d. Not on a zero hours contract
- e. Not in Prison (Can work with people who are on probation)

26. Opportunities include volunteering, work experience and support to secure employment with continued in work support. Financial support and legal advice can also be accessed. Key workers liaise and work with other partners for any other activities appropriate for their participant to access. All participants are able to access any of the support training offered by any of the BB providers if it best meets their needs and their learning styles.

### **Case Study**

27. Young Man (YM), 17 working with a personal advisor from the children in care team, has a criminal record and served a short term custodial sentence. YM spent time out of the main stream school system though has functional maths and English having attended college. PA worked with YM to complete referral having met BB key worker at a multi-agency meeting.
28. YM was assigned a key worker a BB provider which organises a variety of courses for 16-25 year olds to help them develop the essential skills required for both independent life and at work. The key worker worked with YM & PA to create a personalised plan that would support participant to achieve their aims of securing fulltime work within the construction

industry.

29. YM took part in a number of courses which included independent living skills, confidence building and also completed a six week Princes Trust Program. Participant found a volunteering opportunity with local community garden project where they assisted in the building of a picnic and outside learning area for schools and community groups. Working together with the BB partners and their PA the participant started an apprenticeship with a local construction company in September.

### **Grandmentors**

30. Grandmentors mobilises older volunteers (age 50+) to use their wisdom and life experience to support young people leaving care to help them reach their full potential.
31. The programme works with young people from the ages of 16-24 and provides them with a mentor who is not motivated by pay, but because they enjoy it and want to help them. Each volunteer supports a young person for a minimum of six months, working towards agreed personal goals. The programme works in partnership with social workers and personal advisors. It is this combination of skills, experience and effective partnership working that has made the programme a success elsewhere. Volunteering Matters have supported over 250 care leavers to date, and currently operate the Grandmentors programme in the London Boroughs of: Islington and Hounslow, Ipswich in Suffolk and Folkstone, Kent.
32. The Grandmentors programme supports care leavers to make a successful transition into independent living through:
  - a. Improved employability skills, readiness for, and progression in education, employment or training.
  - b. Improved relationships and a wider social network.
  - c. Better mental and emotional wellbeing, greater self-confidence, self-worth and resilience.
  - d. Improved independent living skills, including budgeting, maintaining their accommodation and accessing health services such as GP and dentist.
33. Volunteering Matters internal evaluation of Grandmentors shows that:
  - a. 75% of care leavers reported increased feelings of wellbeing and self-confidence after being matched with a mentor.
  - b. 42% of young people who were not in employment, education or training (NEET) before being matched with a mentor moved into education, employment or training.
34. Under the scheme a Volunteering Matters Coordinator has been recruited and will be co-located within one of the Children-in-Care teams. Their role is to:
  - Recruit, interview, screen and train mentors. This includes taking up references, DBS checks and a comprehensive training programme, including safeguarding, the mentor role, engaging with young people and modelling behaviours.
  - Work closely with the two Children in Care teams to promote the programme and to facilitate referrals.

- Matching – facilitating careful pairing of mentee and mentor to ensure best probability of success. Central to the programme' success is that a young person wants to have a mentor and can choose their mentor.
  - Mentor support – regular support and review meetings. Ensuring that mentor activities are outcome focussed.
  - Impact measurement – quantitative and qualitative information gathered through mentor and mentee surveys, with support from the Volunteering Matters Evaluation Manager.
35. The programme will deliver 25 matches per year in year 1 increasing to 40 matches in year 2. Volunteering Matters have secured funding from Nesta to expand the Grandmentors programme into Wiltshire and provide 50% of the funding for the scheme until March 2020. This funding could continue otherwise we will have to consider budgets going forward based on the success of the programme.

### **Favourable access to Council apprenticeships**

36. We have implemented a guaranteed interview scheme for care leavers to all Council apprenticeships where they meet any eligibility criteria. The Looked After Children and Care Leavers Steering Group is publicizing vacancies and tracking applications. We have recently appointed our first apprentice under this scheme.

### **Work placements (Council & Business)**

37. The Looked After Children and Care Leavers Pathway to Employment Steering Group is introducing a range of work placements for care leavers within the Council. We will use the learning gained through this before looking to extend opportunities into local businesses. This work is currently led by an Employment and Skills Officer.

### **Transport costs**

38. We continue to explore transport options and ways to support young people to travel across rural Wiltshire. Young people have said that cost makes this prohibitive, as a result it increases the sense of isolation and limits ambition. One option is the introduction of a discretionary buss pass scheme.

### **Stability & Security**

#### **Senior Officers to act as mentors**

39. We have a wealth of talented and skilled officers working within the council and it would be a positive extension of our corporate parenting responsibilities to ask senior officers from across all departments to act as a mentor for a care leaver. We have operated similar in the past with some officers continuing to mentor a young person.

#### **Mandatory Training for all officers**

40. We will develop and deliver training to all staff in relation to their corporate parenting responsibilities. While this would not be detailed within the Local Offer, it would help underpin the cultural shift that is required if care leavers are to be provided with the opportunities we would want them to have.



## **Legal advice**

41. Legal services have agreed to provide free legal advice to care leavers. Range and scope to be agreed but will not include criminal law.

## **Care Leaver Champions embedded in each Council Department**

42. Agreement at Head of Service level to identify an individual to act as single point of contact for personal advisers within their department who will commit to identify solutions where care leavers are receiving or requesting a service. This is currently available in the services where the offer is live.

## **Health**

### **Free Leisure Centre Passes**

43. An annual free membership will be offered to care leavers, children in care and Wiltshire Council fostering families and supported lodging carers. We know that nationally health outcomes for LAC and care leavers are poor, in Wiltshire we know that many of our care leavers are socially isolated and experience periods of depression. Offering free access to leisure centres provides a positive message to young people about how they are viewed and gives them the opportunity to become more active and engaged in their local community.

## **CAMHS**

44. Flexible transition is specifically aimed at particularly vulnerable young people (including LAC) age 17 years and over who are currently known to CAMHS and facing concurrent transitions in their social, educational, employment and / or family situations. These young people require ongoing, often intensive emotional support to improve their resilience. In these circumstances CAMHS will provide a continuation of support beyond 18th birthday, with CAMHS interventions tailored around a young person's emotional development, rather than their chronological age. This support, whilst having a mental health focus, also incorporates life skills, employment and / or education opportunities, and generally building emotional resilience for young people who would otherwise struggle to maintain their wellbeing during the transition to adulthood. The flexible transition offer will be explored with those young people whose emotional development would continue to benefit from a CAMHS intervention post 18, but do not require an adult mental health service. However, this service does not accept new referrals for those aged over 18 years.
45. We are working with adult mental health services to secure a priority service for care leavers, particularly where they do not meet traditional eligibility criteria. This is a priority area for the Adults and Children's Transformation programmes.

## **Finance**

### **Revenue & Benefits Workshop and Surgeries**

46. Colleagues within the Council Revenue and Benefits Service will host surgeries for care leavers and PA's to ensure they are in receipt of all relevant benefits. The service will also include personal budgeting/money management support where appropriate.

### **Financial Entitlement Leaflet** (impact of universal benefit)

47. The same team have developed an entitlement leaflet to help inform care leavers and those working with them. Clarity regarding the complexities of the Universal Benefit scheme will be explained in full.

### **Leaving Care Grant**

48. Each care leaver is eligible to a grant of £2000 to support them in their move towards independence. We have considered increasing the grant but after consultation with other local authorities have found that they provide a similar level of funding. In exceptional circumstances local managers can approve a top-up payment.

### **Council Tax exemption**

49. This is cited as a good practice exemplar in the DfE consultation material. Legislation set out statutory exemptions which the council must apply but also permits the local authority to introduce its own exemptions under discretionary powers provided by Regulation 13a of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. In other words the council has a choice whether to introduce a scheme which is unique to Wiltshire; however any scheme must be concise and unambiguous to ensure it is applied in a way that is measurable and consistent. It must be awarded in conjunction with statutory schemes and must also be monitored to ensure it is applied only until the care leaver reaches the age of 25.
50. Analysis of the current caseload has revealed that the type of accommodation occupied by care leavers varies greatly. Some are living independently and or with partners with children of their own and sustaining tenancies, paying full council tax. Others are living in a range of supported accommodation provided by the likes of Alabare and other well know care providers. Some are living with parents or guardians. Many therefore do not find themselves liable for council tax. In fact less than 40 currently find themselves liable for council tax and a further 12 are in a household where their presence affects entitlement to single person discount.
51. A separate report is presented at Full Council on 16th October 2018 to seek approval for this element of the scheme.

### **Contribution towards WiFi payments**

52. Care leavers have said that access to the internet is a real priority for them; while many can do this via mobile phones the cost of access via 4g is high. Other LA's have agreed to pay a contribution towards WiFi. We are comparing the various offers which other LA's make and the safeguards that they have in place but will look to introduce a similar scheme locally within this financial year.

### **Safeguarding Implications**

53. Care leavers are a vulnerable group of young people, the Council has Corporate Parenting responsibilities it must discharge. This Local offer will enable us to fully discharge our responsibilities whilst affording Care leavers the best opportunity to maintain stable and successful lives in adulthood.

### **Public Health Implications**

54. Outcomes for care leavers are much poorer than the general population including rates of suicide, incarceration and teenage pregnancy to name a few. The Local Offer will support care leavers to transition into adulthood and reduce inequalities later in life.

### **Corporate Procurement Implications**

55. None

### **Equalities Impact of the Proposal**

56. This will improve the opportunities for care leavers and reduce inequalities that they experience, given they are from a vulnerable group and are likely to be the subject of multiple vulnerabilities.

### **Environmental and Climate Change Considerations**

57. None

### **Risk Assessment**

58. There is a reputational risk for the council if it is not seen to be ambitious for its Care leavers.

### **Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken**

59. There is a reputational risk, a risk associated with external scrutiny from Ofsted Inspections and more importantly increased risk to individual care leavers and their future opportunities as they move into adulthood if we do not provide comprehensive support in the form of the Local Offer.

### **Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks**

60. None

### **Financial Implications**

61. Looked after children budgets remain under pressure locally as they do nationally. The Government has increased statutory requirements to care leavers but has not provided funding therefore Local Authorities are having to fund this from existing budgets; this will therefore impact on other elements of children's services.

### **Legal Implications**

62. Under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 the Council has a duty to publish a Local Offer for care leavers.

### **Options Considered**

63. A number of options were considered to build the Local Offer for care leavers in consultation with young people, officers, partners and Councillors.

## **Conclusions**

64. This paper presents a comprehensive Local Offer for care leavers as required by the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

## **Proposals**

65. That Full Council endorse the Local Offer for care leavers in Wiltshire.

## **Reasons for Proposals**

66. To meet the legal duty under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and provide a clear commitment to the Council's Corporate parenting responsibilities and ambition for our care leavers.

**Terence Herbert**  
**Corporate Director**

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