



Department  
for Education

# **National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers' First Year Report**

**October 2017 to October 2018**

## Ministerial foreword



When children and young people are taken into care, the State becomes their parent. And in fulfilling that role, the State needs to be as ambitious and aspirational as any other parent is for their children. It needs to provide the love and support that all children need in order to thrive; it needs to help them prepare for the challenges of independent adult life; and it needs to help them to access the opportunities they need to progress and make successful lives.

Local authorities are the primary parent. It is they who make the day to day decisions about where children in care and care leavers live, who cares for them and what additional support they will receive to help them overcome their difficult starts in life, such as additional support to improve their educational attainment, or emotional health and well-being.

The quality of support that local authorities provide is therefore vital. That is why, building on the existing set of duties on local authorities, we have extended the support package that local authorities are required to provide to care leavers, including a new duty to consult on and publish their 'local offer'; and a duty to offer Personal Adviser support to all care leavers to age 25.

To support local authorities to introduce these changes my predecessor, Edward Timpson, appointed Mark Riddell to be the national implementation adviser for care leavers. Over the last year, as well as attending lots of national and regional events, Mark has visited over 40 local authorities to offer advice and support. He has told me that many local authorities are responding positively to the new challenges and I am encouraged by what he has told me about the additional commitments that LAs are including in their local offers, which are now beginning to be published. For example, we know that around half of LAs have decided to introduce Council Tax exemptions for care leavers.

Now that Mark has been in post for a year, I have asked him to compile examples that highlight some of the innovative ways that local authorities are taking forward their new responsibilities and improving the lives of care leavers. This report shows how LAs are being creative in responding to the challenges that care leavers face. Examples have been brigaded under the 5 outcomes set out in the cross-Government care leaver strategy – Keep on Caring. I encourage you all to review this report and think about how you can replicate the good practice in it in your own local areas.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Zahawi'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Nadhim Zahawi MP  
Minister for Children & Families

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## Summary

Reflections from the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers on his findings from his visits from local authorities in his first year in post.

## Expiry or review date

This guidance will be reviewed before October 2019.

## Who is this publication for?

This guidance is for:

- Local authorities

## Main points

This report is based on Mark Riddell's visits to local authorities in his role as the national implementation adviser for care leavers following the passage of the Children and Social Work Act 2017. It celebrates his findings of what is working well and identifies good practice relating to provision for care leavers that all local authorities will find useful. The report also identifies some key challenges that local authorities will need to address in order to provide consistently high quality services for care leavers that fully reflect the corporate parenting principles they should be embedding across services for care leavers.

## Reflections from the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers



I am pleased to be publishing my first annual report just after we have celebrated Care Leavers week in October 2018.

It has been an interesting year for me, leaving local government after many years and taking up my role as National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers. My journey in local government has always been both professionally and personally rewarding but

none more so than with Trafford Council when, in 2016, it was the first local authority in the country to be judged by Ofsted to be 'outstanding' under the care leavers sub-judgement. With this brought huge amounts of interest both from local authorities across the country and from central government.

In my first meeting with the former Children's Minister, Edward Timpson, I advised him that Trafford's approach was underpinned by one key principle – in everything we do, or change, or develop, we have to ask ourselves 'is that good enough for my child'. If that's the starting point what you will find is that discussions and decisions take on a whole new meaning. The Minister was particularly interested in Trafford's Corporate Parenting approach - how we had consulted on and delivered our local offer, including the additional discretionary services we offered over and above care leavers' legal entitlements; and how we had introduced an offer for all our care leavers through to age 25.

Over the last 12 months I have visited over 40 local authorities to offer advice on introducing the new duties brought in through the Children & Social Work Act. It has been heartening to see how positively the sector is responding to the challenge. During those visits I have learnt a huge amount and seen some excellent ways in which local authorities are improving their offer to care leavers, which I have pulled together in this report.

One of the most encouraging things I have seen is the way in which the work to develop their local offer has helped local authorities to work more closely with key partner agencies and stakeholders, especially at a leadership and strategic level.

This report celebrates what is working well and tells a positive story about the difference we are making to the lives of care leavers. But of course there is still a long way to go before every care leaver receives the level of support that we would consider to be good enough for our own children. I have set out my thoughts on the key challenges ahead at the end of the report

Nevertheless, as this report illustrates, there are many examples where local authorities are making a positive difference to care leavers and are being energized and supported in their efforts to change things for the better.

## Keep on Caring strategy/context

The government has made clear that it is passionate about improving the lives and life chances of care leavers. It has said that young people leaving care constitute one of the most vulnerable groups in our society, and stated that both government and wider society have a moral obligation to give care leavers the support they need as they make the transition to adulthood and independent living.

There has been much good work done over the past few years to improve that support, including the launch of the Keep on Caring Strategy in July 2016 and the new care leaver-related provisions in the Children & Social Work Act 2017. I am hoping that we can continue to build and deliver services to care leavers that improve their outcomes and life chances.

However, outcomes for care leavers remain much worse than for their counterparts in the general population and the quality of leaving care services provided by local authorities' remains variable. The care leaver cohort is also changing, as more children enter care at age 16 and over, and with more unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) entering the care system. These changes present new challenges for us all.

The strategy identifies and describes how the State, as corporate parents, will support care leavers to achieve five key outcomes. For the purpose of my Annual Report I will focus on these five key outcomes, making references to practice I have observed, citing good practice examples from local authorities, many of which are being introduced as a result of consulting care leavers on their new local offers.

From November 2017 to October 2018, I have visited 37 local authorities who took up the offer of free consultation and advice regarding their care leaver services (see Annex 1 for a description of the 2 consultation options available to local authorities).

This report draws on examples from these local authorities, as well as good practice that I saw in the New Belongings Project, for which I was the lead officer for the North West.

The visits to local authorities represent most of my work during my first year in my role as national implementation adviser. But I have also attended meetings of all of the Regional Leaving Care Forums and the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum and presented to their members on introducing the new legislation and highlighting good practice examples of local authorities' local offers. I have also met with Children in Care Councils both locally and regionally.

## **Outcome 1: Better prepared and supported to live independently**

The first outcome in Keep on Caring is that all young people leaving care should be better prepared and supported to live independently. In this report, I have focussed on four key areas that I believe local authorities should be addressing in order to achieve this outcome for care leavers:

- How local authorities have used the new corporate parenting principles to develop a local offer that reflects the contribution that every part of the local authority (not just Children's Services) can make, to ensure that care leavers get the support they need;
- How local authorities have subsequently improved their local offer, taking account of the feedback that they received from care leavers;
- How local authorities have implemented the new duty to offer Personal Adviser support to all care leavers to age 25; and
- How local authorities are ensuring that care leavers develop the knowledge and skills to live independently; and have access to the practical and emotional support they need.

### **Corporate Parenting**

From both my own experience and what I have seen on my visits to local authorities, having a strong Corporate Parenting ethos is the bedrock for good services for care leavers. Strong leadership from the Chief Executive in the local authority is key, as well as having the right membership on the Corporate Parenting Board.

### **The Model**

Most local authorities I visited had a traditional Corporate Parenting Board, where elected members, senior officers and children in care councils come together to discuss particular themes affecting children in care and care leavers, alongside reviewing their local data. An alternative approach I have been advising local authorities to adopt is the 'Champion' model that was developed in the New Belongings project. This approach involves elected members taking on the 'champion' role for a particular area of business/service, for example, housing. The way in which this model has been applied in the London Borough of Waltham Forest and in Barnsley is set out below:

## London Borough Waltham Forest

Corporate Parenting Board Meetings – our new approach

In Waltham Forest, the lead member believed that a thematic approach would bring a new focus to the work of the board and enable a more creative and dynamic environment which would better support the delivery of key priorities.

Each meeting focuses on one or two thematic questions related to the key outcomes for care leavers (health/housing/engagement in EET), which enables more time at board meetings to focus on solutions. The Chair has also created executive board meetings, which meet 5 times a year prior to the Board. The purpose of these meetings is to hear directly from front line staff and young people representatives. This approach ensures meetings have a focus on the areas of most importance, which will really make a difference to young people's outcomes.

The board includes a care leaver champion who has been employed by the leaving care team to lead participation work with care leavers in the local authority, who can bring the voice of care leavers to the heart of the decision making process. The champion is playing an active role in shaping support to young people but also feeding back to the Board regarding the views of children. The champion sits on the Board as well as on the Children's Services scrutiny committee. Being directly employed by the council supports the importance of the role and enables her to better network and reach young people who might not otherwise want to engage. In July, she addressed the full Council in the chamber, articulating the continuing challenges and needs of care leavers and reminding elected members of the importance of their Corporate Parenting role and responsibilities.

## Barnsley Council

Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel in Barnsley have formally agreed:

1. that their role is to act as 'pushy parents' for their children in care and care leavers and that the agreed litmus test, which is referred to consistently in meetings and all activities is, "would this be good enough for my child?";
2. to raise the aspirations of and for care leavers and hold officers to account at every Corporate Parenting Panel and Overview & Scrutiny committee against indicative performance outcomes;
3. that the panel would set more aspirational outcomes for their care leavers and to focus on, for example, raising EET outcomes and participation;
4. that a care experienced young person would be appointed as a full and equal member of the panel, to offer challenge from the Care4Us Council;
5. that senior leaders would mentor young people leaving care;
6. that the Care4Us Council attend the full Council's cabinet yearly to report on the Pledge and Takeover Challenge activities; and



7. that Senior Leaders and the Lead Member for children routinely meet with young people, as well as accompanying Social Workers on visits to quality assure practice, and hear the experience and views of children and young people.

Here is an example of a story that was told to a Corporate Parenting Board that changed housing practice and an end to the use of 'intentionality' for care leavers.

## **Stories are the new data**

'I moved into my new flat and was so excited. It was my own place. After a few days I got a knock on my door. I answered the door and there was a man standing there. He was quite old. He said he lived downstairs and if I ever needed anything to give him a shout. I said thank you and closed the door. An hour later the same man knocked on my door this time offering me to join him for tea. Which I again said no thank you and closed the door. That evening I went out with a few friends and after telling them where I lived I was informed that there was a schedule one offender living in the block of flats and they described the man who had knocked on my door twice. I went home frightened and did not do much for a week. I froze. I locked myself in and refused to answer the door to anyone. I finally got the courage to answer the door to my personal adviser. It was agreed that this flat was not safe for me and that I would not return to it. I was told by housing that I had made myself homeless and that I had no options to be re-housed. We challenged this and after a long time I managed to get another flat. Would you say 'that is good enough for your child'.

The example shows the importance of not just looking at data as it does not always tell the whole story. Stories can be much more powerful than data in getting members actively involved in championing improvements for care leavers and shows how powerful the user's voice can be in changing policy and practice. This was discussed in length at the Board and it was agreed that this 'was not good enough for their children'. The social housing provider no longer applied 'intentionality' to care leavers and have become members on the Corporate Parenting board.

## **Membership of the Board and Key Partner Agencies**

With the new statutory duties in place, this is an ideal opportunity to ask 'have we got the right people in the room?'. My visits to local authorities and discussions with Board members indicate that partner agencies are often not represented on corporate parenting boards. This inhibits multi-agency responses to the challenges care leavers face. The local offer provides an opportunity to work with partners such as Jobcentre Plus, CCGs, adult mental health services, YOS/Probation, Housing, Police, etc.

However, I have seen some encouraging examples of joint working in a number of local authorities such as:

- in Coventry, it has agreed that a Housing worker will be placed in the leaving care service to support care leavers into independence and to be tenancy ready. Already they are seeing the benefits of this by care leavers feeding back that they are now better prepared to maintain their tenancies; and
- Norfolk has arranged a half day event where they brought all of their key partners, elected members and operational staff together into the same room to discuss in detail the offers from each key partner agency. A number of ambitions have now been set including that no care leaver will be made homeless and any accommodation being used will be of high quality.

## **The Local Offer for Care Leavers**

The local offer for care leavers is the result of each part of the local authority thinking about how its services can be tailored so that care leavers achieve the best possible outcomes, having taken account of the Corporate Parenting principles. Taking a whole council approach will strengthen the local offer and will help care leavers make a successful transition to independence. I have set out some examples of the way in which some authorities have developed their local offers.

### **London Borough of Bromley**

One approach I have seen was in Bromley where their offer is being driven by their CEO. Their approach is that they are serious about their new corporate parenting duties and that they are not doing this in isolation. Bromley have set up consultation meetings with care leavers and 'local offer' meetings with all key partner agencies involved with care leavers and have got 'into the detail' of what is the actual offer to care leavers. In doing this, Bromley quickly realised that there were significant disparities between what each agency was offering and in reality what care leavers actually needed. As the offer is being driven at the highest level there is a greater strategic buy in from internal and external providers and therefore developing the local offer together was easier to negotiate.

### **Kingston Upon Hull**

In Hull where their local offer is also being driven by both their CEO and Director of Regeneration they have agreed that their 'local offer' needs to be constantly revisited to ensure it is providing the support that care leavers need. Hull has therefore created a 'Local Offer' role with responsibility for reporting to the CEO and the Board. This is the first dedicated post I have come across and following a follow up visit to Hull – six months after the initial two day formal visit - their local offer has seen huge developments. Here are just a few examples of their strengthened offer:

- New dedicated hub for care leavers – providing an integrated service with key partner agencies in the same location.
- Investment of additional leaving care Personal Advisers.
- A 16+ model now being developed (previously was an 18+ model).
- Council Tax Exemption to 25yrs being progressed.
- Reduced travel costs for care leavers with ambition of having free travel for care leavers across Hull.
- Jobs for care leavers in ‘family business’ – 3 care leavers started work recently in Hull City Council.
- City wide approach to improving care leavers’ engagement in EET with the Director of Regeneration as Champion for care leavers looking to secure offers of support for care leavers from Business/Private/3rd Sector.
- Agreement by their social housing provider that ‘priority’ actually means priority for care leavers with no banding, etc.

Further examples of good local offers can be found on the following links below:

- Waltham Forest: [https://search3.openobjects.com/mediamanager/walthamforest/fsd/files/care\\_leavers\\_offer\\_booklet\\_1.pdf](https://search3.openobjects.com/mediamanager/walthamforest/fsd/files/care_leavers_offer_booklet_1.pdf)
- North Yorkshire: <https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/core-offer-care-leavers>
- Stockport: <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/care-leavers-local-offer/>

## **Extending support from a Personal Adviser to all care leavers to age 25**

In April this year, local authorities were required to extend existing entitlements so that all care leavers will be able to access support from a local authority Personal Adviser to age 25. In most of the authorities I have visited they have taken a proactive approach to this new duty by informing care leavers before they turn 21yrs old and keeping in contact if care leavers choose not to receive a full support service from their Personal Adviser after age 21. For the care leavers who have been closed under the previous legislation there has been a mixed approach to how that cohort are reached and tracked.

In relation to the extended support to care leavers up to 25yrs I have seen some really good examples where local authorities have used a number of flexible approaches for keeping in touch with care leavers who don’t necessarily need or want a full service from the leaving care team. In Darlington, care leavers can access their ‘Hub’ at any time and meet other care leavers and support is offered through peer mentor relationships. In York, care leavers meet up regularly to have a ‘shared tea’ to form relationships and to reduce isolation when 9 to 5 services have closed.

## **Cheshire East Council**

In Cheshire East, they sent a recorded delivery letter to all care leavers informing them of the new duty and are now in contact with most of their care leavers. They wanted to take a proactive approach so they could plan ahead in any eventuality especially where care leavers may have entered the prison system or were homeless or at risk of being homeless. In doing this, the number of care leavers requesting a service was around 25%.

As this is a new requirement, I have been advising local authorities to keep local data and in particular the number of care leavers who have returned for a service, the reason for the return, the financial element if appropriate, the time it takes to assess and resolve a particular return issue i.e. personal adviser time. This will enable local authorities to gather evidence in building up a national picture over the next few years so that central government are clear about the current and future level of investment needed.

## **Warwickshire County Council**

Part of the Local Offer in Warwickshire involved creating a Drop-In Centre for its Leaving Care and Unaccompanied Asylum seeking young people, where they could come to relax, play games, watch TV, access the internet or just generally socialise as well as having improved access to social care support. The plan is to develop the service so that the hub can be a “one stop shop” and agencies such as housing, health, CAMHS, and DWP will also run surgeries and training events from this venue.

## **Being well prepared and supported to live independently**

In preparing care leavers to be better supported to live independently, in Trafford they have an Independent Living Skills Workbook which is started at 16yrs and is completed by the young person, their care provider and their Personal Adviser and is used as their housing application form. It covers all aspects of living independently from managing your money, changing a plug and being tenancy ready.

In Stockport, they have engaged Pure Insight in offering mentors for care leavers which supplements the support offered by the Personal Adviser and offers a different perspective from someone in the local community with real life experiences. And in Havering they have opened ‘The Cocoon’ where care leavers can just drop in for a cup of tea or for a more formal discussion with a leaving care worker around any particular issue. The Cocoon is the one stop shop/integrated approach for their care leavers for advice around issues like debt, paying bills, sexual health, housing issues, etc.

## Stockport Borough Council

Stockport Family's Leaving Care Team have worked closely with local charity Pure Insight for a number of years, and their services are focused on the emotional health and wellbeing of all care leavers living in Stockport. Their services include a volunteer mentor scheme, which provides care leavers living independently to have someone to talk to at evenings and weekends. This combats the isolation and loneliness that is reported by young people living in their own tenancies. Other projects include a drop in café and Sunday lunch club, mums and tots groups and various gym and other positive activities.

Stockport also offers free gym passes to all care leavers being supported by the Leaving Care Team, but also all care leavers who have requested their case is closed but have signed up to their Lifelong Policy. It also provides free museum and heritage passes for all care leavers living in Stockport.

Other services that are being developed in line with PA to 25 years and the Local Offer include:

- Developing a peer mentor scheme;
- Extending the relationship between the LAC nurse and care leavers up to the age of 25 years;
- Free travel for care leavers living in Greater Manchester, which is a key factor in enabling care leavers to develop networks of support and increase participation in local communities

## London Borough of Wandsworth

Wandsworth asked it's leaving care team staff and young people how the Future First – leaving care offices - could be improved to make a space that care leavers would be more likely to drop in to and use. Based on their feedback, the Council invested in a refurbishment of the access area for service users to make a larger, more open space, with access to computers. Young people chose the furnishings to ensure the space felt approachable and young person friendly. Sessions are driven by care leavers and what is important to them. Specialist agencies will use the space to offer good advice around health, managing money, EET opportunities and housing advice.

Mark Riddell with a group of care leavers at their new Future First resource.



Further examples of good local offers are included in annexes 4 to 7 at end of the report.

I have included in Annex 3 examples of the changes introduced by both the London Boroughs of Waltham Forest and Bracknell Forest six months after my two day visit.

## **Outcome 2: Improved access to education, training and employment**

The second key outcome is improved access to education, employment and training. Unfortunately, the national picture is that only 52% of care leavers are in EET, which in my view is not acceptable. I believe that we have to be more ambitious and set local targets around 70%-80%. One simple way that local authorities can improve their care leavers' EET rate is to provide ring-fenced/supported opportunities in the Council and with local partners/businesses and work closely with regeneration and community development colleagues in the local authority to bring their local businesses into the 'corporate family'.

Here are a few examples of what local authorities are doing to promote care leavers' engagement in EET:

### **Suffolk County Council**

In Suffolk, they have made considerable efforts to engage with the Suffolk Chamber of Commerce. As a result they have put on events where local employers and partner organisations have been able to engage with the local authority and make a pledge of support and develop a local version of the Suffolk Covenant to extend their local offer beyond the statutory minimum. At a recent event they received over 45 offers from the business sector and partner organisations, such as work based placements with local employers.

### **London Borough of Wandsworth**

Wandsworth has invested in supporting care leavers to engage in EET by creating two participation apprenticeships posts, both ring fenced for care leavers. Their experience of the care system in Wandsworth has helped to embed the voice of our care leavers at the core of its leaving care service and the development of its local offer.

It has also permanently increased the number of ETE workers in the Future First (the leaving care team) from 1FTE to 3FTE to provide targeted, bespoke support. A focus on education, employment and training has also led to 5 apprenticeship posts and two fixed term full time employment posts at the Council all being ring-fenced for care leavers.

### **Warwickshire County Council**

A dimension to Warwickshire's Local Offer has been to ring-fence apprenticeships for Care Leavers within the Council. They currently have eight of their young people either working or about to start work within the Leaving Care Team, Participation service, and transformation team, including one young person who was an unaccompanied asylum

seeking child. As well as fulfilling its corporate parenting responsibility to these young people by promoting their access to career development opportunities, they in turn are proving to be invaluable sources of support in helping to further develop the service and promoting better outcomes for care leavers across the county. In all of these examples the local authorities have reported an increase in their EET figures of around 10%, which is really encouraging.

The case studies above are good examples of improving EET opportunities for care leavers. I have also seen local authorities working in partnership with organisations like Drive Forward to offer a bespoke EET programme to prepare and support care leavers to get ready for EET opportunities, alongside building CVs and interview skills.

Trafford Council worked closely with their local college and offered funding to support a six week pre-employment programme over the summer holidays to 10 care leavers of whom eight went on to either employment, education or training. I have also heard about a scheme in North Lincolnshire where care leavers collect old furniture, renovate it and then sell it or give it to care leavers when setting up their first home.

The Government is funding a number of care leaver social impact bond pilots, which use a 'payment by results' approach to helping care leavers into EET, with the up-front funding being provided by a social investor. I am keen to see how the care leaver SIBs work and plan to visit the pilots during my second year.



## **Outcome 3: Experiencing stability and feeling safe and secure**

The third key outcome is that care leavers should experience stability in their lives, and feel safe and secure. In this section I have chosen to focus primarily on housing, as most if not all local authorities I have visited report this as a challenging area. Across the country it's a mixed picture with authorities in the north reporting more availability of social housing but in more deprived areas raising the question of suitability and safety. Whilst in London and the south east, the question of lack of availability and affordability are the predominant features. With these in mind, local authorities continue to develop and promote Staying Put arrangements and strengthening their Supported Accommodation Frameworks.

Here are a few examples of how local authorities are strengthening their housing options for care leavers:

### **Kingston Upon Hull**

Hull are currently working on an ambitious 'housing framework' that young people cannot fall out of. This is in conjunction with the Targeted Youth/Housing options team.

This is based on the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework (developed by Barnardo's in partnership with St Basil's). Hull is putting a business case forward for an additional housing options adviser in the leaving care team so that they can ensure all care leavers have a housing options interview early on to make clear the offers available; and to support the development of independence skills and the reality of living independently. There has also been some discussion around an accredited scheme to promote the development of independent living skills 'passport to a property' to further support this, also with a specific post attached.

Hull has gone even further in strengthening its housing offer. For care leavers who are successful in being allocated a property Hull now has an extended rent free period to enable their personal advisers to ensure setting up home is completed in the timescales that suit the care leaver. There is an agreement for all white goods to be installed and the property decorated prior to move in date.

### **London Borough of Wandsworth**

A dedicated Housing Officer has worked alongside the Council's Housing and Regeneration team and with housing associations to ensure that there is sufficient suitable accommodation for care leavers. As a result, no care leavers have been placed in B&B since November 2015; Housing and Regeneration have increased nominations for our care leavers; care leavers accommodation has been recommissioned to include

capacity for more flexible, individualised support; and care leavers continue to provide feedback via their Young Inspectors scheme.

The case studies above are good examples of local authorities working really hard to improve their housing offer to care leavers. The House Project, which was originally funded in round one of the Innovation Programme was set-up to support care leavers to develop positive solutions to housing challenges as they leave care. The project is based on co-operative principles, and is run with and for, ten care leavers aged 16+ at any one time. The project involves the transfer of ten council properties to the project and allowed young people to stay in the property for as long as they wanted.

The House Project was further funded in Round Two of the Innovation Programme to scale up their work by both setting up and supporting projects in five other local authorities (Islington, Oxford, Warwickshire, Rotherham and Doncaster).

The projects' impact has seen care leavers successfully managing their tenancies, securing long term accommodation quicker which promoted their stability and motivation to seek EET opportunities.

## **Outcome 4: Improved Access to Health Support**

The fourth key outcome is improved access to health support for care leavers. In advising local authorities around their health offer I have asked them to consider a 'favoured approach' to care leavers. What I mean by this is a mixed approach to meeting the health needs of care leavers and not 'a one size fits all' approach. Most local authorities provide an in-house CAMHS service for children in care. The health offer to care leavers is less explicit. On my visits I have been told that CAMHS services are under pressure with greater demand being made by higher numbers of children coming into care resulting in longer waiting lists and changes in eligibility. In turn what does this mean for care leavers post 18yrs? In many cases it means accessing mainstream universal services who are also under pressure. The outcome for care leavers is that leaving care teams end up responding to crisis with limited long term impact with care leavers ending up in high level interventions, i.e. hospital beds, mental health units and prison.

With this in mind local authorities and health providers are working really hard to improve their health offer. Here are a few examples:

### **Stockport Borough Council**

Within the Stockport Leaving Care Team there is a team of Intensive Support Workers who can also provide support during evenings and weekends, to support the emotional wellbeing of young people living in the community and who feel isolated. It also has a Mental Health Practitioner from the Transitions team seconded to the Leaving Care Team 2 days a week. This worker provides a link between children's and adult mental health services, provides a consultation role to the leaving care staff and provides training on mental health and direct interventions. There is a facility to fast track referrals to Beacon Counselling for care leavers and they also have a contract with Samaritans.

### **London Borough of Wandsworth**

Wandsworth has worked closely with health partners to ensure that all care leavers receive a health summary – Health Passport - when they leave care. The leaving care service also has a dedicated counsellor who carries out direct work with young people and proactively engages in developing partnerships with other health providers including Drive Forward and Working with Men and Mind.

### **London Borough of Waltham Forest**

Waltham Forest is developing a coherent vision for the commissioning and delivery of services including access to CAMHS up to age 25 as a mandatory expectation. They have also appointed two Primary Mental Health workers who offer systemic consultation to professionals within the service, alongside externally and one to one consultations for children in care and care leavers.

## Outcome 5: Achieving Financial Stability

The fifth and final key outcome is that care leavers should achieve financial stability. This is quite a broad outcome for care leavers and I will focus on two areas. Firstly, how local authorities are ensuring their Personal Advisers are providing advice and support to help care leavers manage their money. The second is where central government and in particular other government departments can give care leavers a helping hand as they journey through independence in the same way that we do as parents for our own children.

I have seen some good examples in a number of local authorities for example in:

- Dudley Council where the leaving care team have regular sessions with care leavers to look at money management and debt avoidance by using the Barclays Money Management website.
- Darlington they get colleagues from their finance directorate to attend sessions with care leavers to explore their understanding of managing money and offer a range of solutions to avoid the use of money lenders and pay day loans.
- Another way of creating financial stability is by offering a Council tax exemption to care leavers up to 25 years - there are now over 70 local authorities who have put a Council Tax exemption in place.

In some authorities, they have developed a Protocol with their Benefits agency that promotes a 'last resort' sanction approach for care leavers, with clear communication channels between the Jobcentre Plus offices and leaving care teams. This ensures that if a sanction is to be imposed that the care leaver gets the right support to get through the sanction to prevent them from having to use money lenders or build up arrears.

I have also heard from members of the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum that a number of local authorities are:

- considering when housing benefit arrears occur that a ceiling is put on that debt and acts as a marker so that housing benefit colleagues can then contact the respective leaving care worker so that the debt does not escalate to the point of debt recovery and possible court action; and
- supporting care leavers to access Credit Union accounts

It is encouraging that Government has introduced a new £1,000 bursary for care leavers who take up an apprenticeship. However, many care leavers still struggle with poverty and debt and addressing this issue needs a cross-Government commitment.

# Aims and Ambitions for 2019-20

## Aims

My overarching aims for 2019-20 are:

- To continue to promote the implementation of the care leaver-related provisions in the Children & Social Work Act 2017 so that care leavers receive the best possible help and support from their local authority Corporate Parents.
- To work across government to ensure there remains a continued and committed approach to care leavers and to explore how the role of the State in supporting care leavers can be strengthened.

I will do this by:

- Continuing to offer consultancy support to local authorities who wish to take up the offer.
- Engaging with leaving care national and regional forums.
- Sharing good practice across the sector by attending seminars and conferences.
- Reviewing local authority local offers.
- Engaging with care leavers through their regional forums.
- Continued dialogue with Ministers and other government departments.

## Ambitions

- The ambitions I would like to set for local authorities, which are shared by the local authorities I have visited, are as follows:
- To set a target of between 70%-80% for their young people engaged in EET.
- To employ care leavers in the 'family business' by ring fencing apprenticeships and paying national living wage and in particular to employ a Care Leaver Ambassador in the leaving care team.
- To exempt all care leavers from Council tax up to 25yrs.
- To ensure that no care leaver is made homeless and that any accommodation offered by the local authority is of a high standard that would be good enough for your own child.
- That local authorities adopt a favoured approach to care leavers especially as they transition through services such as adult and health with one referral pathway.

# Annex 1

Brief outline for two day visits.

## Day One

Time	Sessions
<b>9.00am – 10.30am</b>	CEO, Executive member, Leader of Council and Director and Senior officers to discuss the progress from last Ofsted, What 'good' looks like, New Statutory Duties, the development of the 'local offer' for all 16yrs to 25yrs old, Corporate Parenting Strategy and the extended PA support to all care leavers up to 25yrs.
<b>11am-12.30</b>	Heads of Services for children in care and care leavers and team managers to discuss the operational model for leaving care for 16yrs old to 25yrs olds, Pathway planning processes, the impact on a strengthened 'local offer', the PA duty to 25yrs, what works well in practice and how Corporate Parenting is disseminated across the service.
<b>1.30pm – 3pm</b>	Team manager and PA's to discuss how the leaving care service is delivered operationally with a focus on strengths and challenges, caseloads and the new statutory duties.
<b>3.30pm – 5pm</b>	Meeting a group of care leavers to discuss the existing Corporate Parenting offer, new care leavers strategy and how it feels to be a care leaver.
<b>Day two – am</b>	
<b>9.30am – 10.30am</b>	Diagnostic discussion and agreements on way forward with Head of Service, Team manager and Personal Advisor reps
<b>11.00am – 12.00</b>	Feedback discussion and recommendations from diagnostic discussion with CEO, Leader, Director, Head of Service, Team manager and Personal Advisor reps.
<b><u>12:00</u></b>	End of formal visit. Follow up visit in 6 months.

## Brief Outline for 3hr Roundtable

<p><b>10am – 1pm</b></p>	<p>This is a 3hr roundtable discussion. The first session – about an hour or so and is with Corporate Parenting Board Members, DCS, Senior Managers, the leaving care manager and a few Personal Advisors on what ‘good’ looks like with ideas being shared about good practice, interpreting data and the new statutory duties. The second session also for about an hour is focused on the ‘local offer’, the delivery model for leaving care and resources. At the end of the visit you will be asked to set some goals/aspirations that you would like to achieve for care leavers that can then be ratified by your Corporate Parenting Board and CiC Council/Care Leavers Forum.</p> <p>The timing of these meeting are usually 10am to 1pm with a break in the middle.</p>
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## Annex 2

### Overarching Principles to underpin the New Corporate Parenting Duties

Through the work of the New Belongings Project a number of overarching principles were identified that Corporate Parenting Boards should adopt when considering their new Corporate Parenting Duties. In advising local authorities in strengthening their Boards in line with the new duties I am asking them to consider working through the following principles:

- Care-proofing of policy: Corporate parents recognise the vulnerability of care leavers as young adults, and prioritise and reference them in policy documents
- Assumption of entitlement: Corporate parents will assume all care leavers are entitled to services, support and opportunities. Where discretion exists in definitions of vulnerability, or in giving priority access, these will be in favour of care leavers.
- Relationships are the 'golden thread' of good practice. Corporate parents will demonstrate that priority is given to relationship-based practice, based on understanding, empathy, respect, and 'stickability'. They will do this by minimising staffing changes, understanding caseloads and complexity, promoting consistency in workers and considering changes to services based on individual need rather than age.

Each of the above if adopted alongside the new Corporate Parenting Duties will make a difference to the offer to care leavers. I have already begun to see the impact this is having in a number of local authorities where elected members are championing a particular theme for example housing on the Corporate Parenting Board. The elected member is given the information and data around suitability, affordability and safe accommodation for care leavers and also meets with leaving care workers to see how this works on the ground and if there are any exceptions or instances where care leavers are placed at risk i.e. of homelessness or eviction or placed in accommodation that is not good enough. The elected member reports this back to the Board and to the housing provider. The outcome for care leavers of this approach is that more housing options were considered including 'taster flats or training flats' that could also be used also as emergency accommodation to prevent homelessness.



## Annex 3

As a result of my visits most local authorities use the feedback to pull together an action plan. Here are two examples of what has been achieved by the London Borough's of Waltham Forest and Bracknell Forest six months after my visit.

### London Borough of Waltham Forest

1. An independent company has been involved in updating the Care Leavers offer into digital format. Young people, Leaving Care Coaches and social workers have played an active role in the redesign of current format. The Care Leavers offer has also been reorganised into age related sections 16 – 17 years old, 18-21years old and 22 – 24 years old.
2. The staffing structure for care leaving service has been developed to include three new permanent Leaving Care Coach posts as well as two agency LCC posts. With the increased number of LCC's caseloads have reduces drastically. Once all LCC's are in post end of September 2018 this will bring the caseloads further down.
3. Terms of Reference for Corporate Parenting Board has been developed to reflect partnership accountability.
4. Benefits partners have been involved in developing the offer (Council Revenues and Benefits & DWP). Care Leavers who struggle with rent and Council Tax debt - Benefits officers have agreed to use their discretion under the Discretionary Council Tax Hardship scheme to reduce their liability to nil.
5. Close working relationship has been forged with DWP
6. There continue to be close corporation with Housing Providers to improving the Care Leaver offer: timeliness, preparation, intentional homelessness, choice and range of offers.
7. Engage health partners in developing and delivering a 16 to 21 mental health offer for Care leavers Looked After Children. With support from LAC Health Strategic Partnership Board health partners are currently contributing towards the care leavers offers.
8. A Care Leaver's Champion has successfully been appointed in the leaving care team.
9. Virtual school have been successful in a bid to the DWP for a Community Fund Care leaver's project. An exciting "Pathways in to work" media-themed project, which also includes peer mentoring training. DWP – Business Training Community Partnership (Iona McArdle)The bid will fund the following : employability workshop, Peer mentoring, Tottenham Hotspur - British School of Coaching will offer the peer mentoring course, an apprentice will be appointed who will develop an online menu of support pathways to make the wider offer to care leavers more accessible.

## London Borough of Bracknell Forest

Having listened to the views of the care leavers who met with the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers, Mark Riddell, we have progressed a number of things:

- Refurbishment of Holly House with Look Ahead Housing has started and the first block available to care leavers and will be operational soon. The remaining refurbishment will continue with a completion date prior to Christmas and where more care leavers will benefit from these joint housing arrangements.
- Our Virtual Care Leavers group/meeting has progressed further with a new format looking at a RAG rating system in supporting care leavers.
- We have also welcomed the Job Centre Plus (staff member - lead for care leavers) as a regular participant at our team meetings. This has made a huge difference to the support offered to Care Leavers, especially in relation to Universal Credit.
- We are also looking at incorporating the Young Person Housing Panel with our Virtual Care Leavers group to facilitate a more robust working relationship with Housing and a better outcome for Care Leavers as one of our partner agencies.
- We are liaising with the lead member for transport in regards to free bus passes for care leavers in Bracknell Forest Council
- We continue to work towards supporting care leavers out of area with council tax charges.



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