

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 14 September 2026

Report Title

Care Leavers' Charter

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

Yes

Executive Director Approving Submission of the Report

Nicola Curley, Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services

Report Author(s)

Jane Wood, Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

In November 2024, Cabinet approved a new Leaving Care Strategy for 2024 to 2027 and a revised Care Leaver Local Offer. This report provides an update on the Local Offer and the development of a Care Leavers' Charter, which will clearly set out the commitments and support available to care-experienced young adults.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. Note the development of the Care Leavers' Charter.
2. Approve the proposals set out within the Care Leavers' Charter, recognising the Council's commitment to improving outcomes and opportunities for Care Leavers.
3. Agree that the Care Leavers' Charter progresses to Full Council for endorsement.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 – Rotherham Care Leavers Charter

Appendix 2 – Part A - Initial Equality screening Assessment form

Appendix 3 – Part B – Equality Analysis Form

Appendix 4 – Climate Impact Assessment

Background Papers

[Rotherham Leaving Care Strategy, Cabinet Report, 18th November 2025.](#)

[Housing Allocations Policy, Cabinet report, 15th September 2025.](#)

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

Corporate Parenting Partnership Board

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Care Leavers' Charter

1. Background

- 1.1 The Children and Social Work Act (2017) and statutory guidance set out the responsibilities of Local Authorities as Corporate Parents to ensure that Care Leavers are offered the same standard of care that their peers would receive from a reasonable parent. This is with the aim that all Care Leavers are provided with opportunities and support to successfully transition to adulthood (Department for Education (DFE), 2022; The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, volume three). Rotherham Council is a committed and supportive Corporate Parent and as such, has created a bespoke Leaving Care Strategy to ensure that Care Leavers are a focus for all partners.
- 1.2 There are currently 443 Care Leavers aged 16 to 21 and 173 aged 22 to 25 in Rotherham. A Care Leaver is a young person aged between 16 and 25 who has previously been in the care of the Local Authority. A young person is considered to be a Care Leaver when they reach 16 years old, even though they may not yet have left the care of the Local Authority. Every Local Authority has a duty to provide leaving care services to Care Leavers, including allocation of a Personal Advisor (PA) until a Care Leaver reaches 21 years old and support beyond, where required, up to the age of 25.
- 1.3 The Leaving Care Strategy 2024-2027 outlined the three-year plan for Rotherham Care Leavers. The Strategy set out priorities for Care Leavers and outlined improvements to services and practice for children who are Care Leavers or Care Experienced. Delivery of the Leaving Care Strategy 2024-2027 is overseen by the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board, with progress reports provided every six months.
- 1.4 Rotherham Children's Social Care services were subject to an inspection by Ofsted in 2025. Ofsted introduced a stand-alone judgement on "the experiences and progress of Care Leavers" into the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework in January 2023. This replaced the previous approach where Care Leavers were assessed together with Children in Care. The move was intended to ensure an increased visibility of Care Leavers within inspections and helped ensure Care Leavers' needs are not overshadowed by Children in Care.
- 1.5 The outcome of this inspection was that the experience and progress of Care Leavers was judged to be 'Good,' across a backdrop of an overall judgement of services as 'Outstanding.' The inspection noted clear strengths relating to how the Council supports Care Leavers. The inspection noted "practitioners advocate strongly for young people and provide support that promotes safety and belonging" as well as noting a "strong corporate and political backing so that Care Leavers benefit from a stable, highly skilled workforce and a service which is focused on their needs."
- 1.6 However, Ofsted also felt that there was more the Local Authority could do for Care Leavers in relation to consistency of education and skills

opportunities and housing sufficiency, and that this could form the next stage of its ambition for its young people.

- 1.7 The Council's Children and Young People's Services launched the Children in Care 'Pledge' in Summer 2025, showcasing the commitment to children in the care of the Local Authority as part of the wider corporate parenting approach.
- 1.8 Children and Young People's Services have progressed a Care Leavers' Charter following this success. A Care Leavers' Charter is a commitment from a Local Authority to principles and promises that support young people leaving care, the development of which is supported by the Care Leavers themselves.
- 1.9 The Look Ahead group is Rotherham's participation forum for Care Leavers and young people with care experience. The forum provides a regular opportunity for Care Leavers to share their views, experiences and ideas about the services and support they receive. It enables young people to influence service development, identify areas for improvement and work collaboratively with the Council and partner agencies to help shape policies, practice, and future priorities.
- 1.10 Look Ahead has been instrumental in the development of the Care Leavers' Charter, ensuring that the commitments contained within it reflect the needs, aspirations, and lived experiences of Care Leavers in Rotherham. Through ongoing engagement, the Forum helps ensure that the voices of Care Leavers remain central to the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities and continuous improvement activity. Care Leavers told the Council that the following focus was of great importance to them:
- Living in a home which is clean and tidy and ready for them to move into.
 - Access to lower cost goods to furnish first homes.
 - Extra support in the first few days of moving into a new property.
 - Understanding where to get help from and having named people to help to solve problems, reduce loneliness or signpost for wellbeing support.
- 1.11 Rotherham Council and its partners recognise that care experienced young people and adults bring valuable skills, perspectives, and resilience to communities. As Corporate Parents, the Council is committed to ensuring that care experience is never a barrier to achieving positive outcomes. It will continue to challenge stigma and discrimination, promote understanding of care experience across the Council and partner organisations, and ensure that the voices of Care Leavers remain central to the development of services and decision-making. Through the Care Leavers' Charter, the Council is not only reaffirming its commitment to providing practical support and opportunities, but also celebrating the achievements, aspirations, and contributions of care experienced people across Rotherham.

- 1.12 Building on the strengths of the Leaving Care Service and the opportunities already developed with partners across Rotherham, this Charter reflects the shared ambition for Care Leavers. It demonstrates the Council's commitment to providing practical support, creating opportunities, challenging stigma and discrimination, and ensuring that the voices of care experienced young people and adults continue to shape services and influence decision-making.
- 1.13 The Rotherham Care Leavers Local Offer ensures Care Leavers are provided with a range of support to help them transition to adulthood. This includes bespoke support with aspects of their life that are unique to them, as for many Care Leavers the blueprint they have may have been impacted by their own experiences and trauma; support with becoming a parent is an example of this. It may also include support with finances, housing and accommodation, education and employment, health and well-being, culture and identity, family and relationships and support in or when exiting custody if applicable. The Care Leavers' Charter is designed to complement the Leaving Care Local Offer, offering tangible benefits and opportunities to support the success of young people leaving care.
- 1.14 In September 2025, Cabinet approved the Housing Allocation Policy giving Care Leavers higher priority for social housing. The Policy awards Band One to Rotherham Care Leavers and Band Three to out of Borough Care Leavers, including Care Leavers who have been placed in Rotherham by other Local Authorities. The Allocation Policy is a graduated approach to the allocation of housing, based on need. Band One is the highest banding and is for applicants who are assessed as being statutorily homeless under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 and are owed the full housing duty. Band Three is a lower banding priority.
- 1.15 The Corporate Parenting Partnership Board has played an important role in shaping and supporting the development of the Charter. Care Leavers regularly attend Board meetings, providing direct feedback on their experiences and helping to influence the Council's priorities and commitments. This ongoing engagement ensures that the Charter reflects the voices of young people and promotes continuous improvement in the support and opportunities available to Care Leavers.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 On 10th July 2025, the Government published updated guidance in relation to housing for those with Care Experience. Following the updated guidance, the Council sought reciprocal agreements with other South Yorkshire Local Authorities in prioritising the housing need of Care Leavers and the delegation to enable this was approved by Cabinet in July 2025. Reciprocal agreements are now in place with regional neighbours.
- 2.2 Care Leavers are actively involved in the continual review of the Local Offer and are now fully aware of their rights and entitlements as Care Leavers. The Local Offer is hosted on the Local Offer website and is regularly updated as required.

- 2.3 Children and Young People's Services have completed benchmarking activity in relation to the Local Offer and are assured that this is a strong offer for Care Leavers.
- 2.4 The Care Leavers' Charter is intended to demonstrate the Council's key commitment to Care Leavers. Following the successful launch of the Children in Care Pledge in 2025, the Council have ensured that the content has been created by young people and young adults who have experienced the care system and have a real life understanding of some of the barriers they face within society.
- 2.5 The Care Leavers' Charter will be shared with practitioners, partners, and leaders with an encouragement to agree to commit to the content of the Charter.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
- a. Note the development of the Care Leavers' Charter.
 - b. Approve the proposals set out within the Care Leavers' Charter, recognising the Council's commitment to improving outcomes and opportunities for Care Leavers.
 - c. Recommend to Full Council that the Care Leavers' Charter be endorsed and that the Council commits to promoting and embedding its principles across all services, policies, and decision-making processes.
- 3.2 If these recommendations are approved the Care Leavers' Charter provides a clear framework for the Council and its partners to strengthen support for care-experienced young people as they transition to adulthood. Adopting the Charter demonstrates the Council's commitment to fulfilling its corporate parenting responsibilities, ensuring Care Leavers receive the opportunities, support, and advocacy they need to achieve positive outcomes and thrive as independent adults.
- 3.3 An alternative option would be to not approve the recommendation or adopt the Care Leavers' Charter. This would mean that Rotherham would not benefit from a clear and visible commitment to improving outcomes for Care Leavers through the principles set out in the Charter. Failure to adopt the Charter could result in missed opportunities to strengthen the Council's corporate parenting offer, promote greater awareness of Care Leavers' needs across services, and encourage a consistent whole-Council approach to supporting care-experienced young people. It may also limit opportunities to demonstrate the Council's commitment to listening to Care Leavers and embedding their voices in service development and decision-making. Whilst statutory duties towards Care Leavers would remain unchanged, the Council would be less able to evidence its ambition to go beyond these minimum requirements and champion improved outcomes in areas such as education, employment, housing, health, wellbeing, and participation. This option is not recommended.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 Engagement and consultation with the Look Ahead Forum has informed the development of the Care Leavers' Charter and the proposals contained within this report. The Charter has been co-produced with Care Leavers to ensure that it reflects their experiences, priorities, and aspirations, and that the commitments made are meaningful and relevant to their lived experience.
- 4.2 The development of the Charter has also been discussed with the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board, which has provided oversight and support for strengthening the Council's approach to meeting its corporate parenting responsibilities.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 The Service Manager for Voice & Influence will ensure that the Care Leavers' Charter is launched across the service, partnership and to Care Leavers.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct procurement implications associated with the recommendations detailed in this report.
- 6.2 There are no direct financial implications arising from the proposals and recommendations outlined in this report. It should be noted that funding for the range of support to Care Leavers via the Local Offer (e.g. support with finances, housing and accommodation, education, etc.) is already provided for within the children's social care budget.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 Under section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 there is a requirement to have regard to the corporate parent principles when discharging functions in relation to Children in Care and care experienced young people. This is to be applied alongside the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: care planning and placement and case review and The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for Care Leavers. Section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires each Local Authority to consult and publish the Local Offer for its Care Leavers, as set out in this paper.
- 7.2 The Local Offer guidance introduced in February 2018 was updated in February 2025 and provides guidance on the development of a Local Offer, which should set out what each Local Authority department will provide rather than just focus on what Children's Services can offer.
- 7.3 Once there has been consultation on the Local Offer and it is published, the statutory guidance sets out the Government's expectation that the Local Offer is reviewed at least two to three years following consultation to ensure services reflect what care experienced young people need the most. In view

of the legal framework and statutory guidance, there are no legal implications by following the recommendations at paragraph 3.1.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 There are no direct HR implications associated with the proposals and recommendations detailed in this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 The aim of the Care Leavers' Charter is to provide Care Leavers with a framework for robust, multi-agency support to help them feel more empowered and in control of their lives. By valuing their strengths and listening to their point of view, a charter helps build a Care Leaver's self-esteem and confidence. Ultimately, a Charter is designed to address the systemic disadvantages Care Leavers often face and drive better results across multiple areas of their lives.
- 9.2 Delivery of the Charter aligns with the key local partnership priorities and plans, including Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council Plan 2025/30, Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership Priorities and Rotherham Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025/30.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 Equality and human rights are considered within the Care Leaver Local Offer. Part A Equalities Screening is attached as Appendix 2 and Part B is attached as Appendix 3.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 Implications included in the Carbon Impact Assessment (Appendix 4).

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 The Care Leaver Local Offer and the Care Leavers' Charter should not be considered as exclusively for the Local Authority to deliver. The broader Corporate Parenting principles should be delivered by the broader partnership. Partner agencies have been spoken to about the development of a Care Leaver Charter and are supportive of this.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 The Council has a duty to support Care Leavers in law. The development of the Care Leavers' Charter is a way of demonstrating the fulfilment of this duty.
- 13.2 There are no financial risks associated with the decision set out in this report.
- 13.3 Supporting the decisions as set out in this report will have beneficial implications in relation to reputation, demonstrating the Council's commitment to Care Leavers.

14. Accountable Officers

Stuart Williams - Service Director, Children's Social Care

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	John Edwards	21/08/26
Executive Director of Corporate Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	17/08/26
Service Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	18/08/26

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