
Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet - 18 November 2024

Report Title

Rotherham Leaving Care Strategy 2024-2027

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

Yes

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

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

Report Author(s)

Jane Wood, Head of Service, Children in Care and Corporate Parenting.

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

The Leaving Care Strategy 2024-2027 outlines the three-year plan for Rotherham Care Leavers. The Strategy sets out priorities for care experienced young people and outlines improvements to services and practice for children who are Care Leavers or Care Experienced.

Recommendations

That Cabinet approve the Leaving Care Strategy and approve the three-year plan as set out within the Strategy.

List of Appendices Included

- Appendix 1 Leaving Care Strategy 2024-2027
- Appendix 2 Part A Initial Equality Screening Assessment
- Appendix 3 Part B Equality Analysis Form
- Appendix 4 Carbon Impact Assessment

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Background Papers

None

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel
No

Council Approval Required
No

Rotherham Leaving Care Strategy 2024 – 2027

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 (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 This report introduces the Leaving Care Strategy 2024-2027. The purpose of this report is to set out six priorities to focus on over the next three years in respect of Leaving Care. The Strategy should be considered alongside the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-2027, which outlines the Council's ambitions for Children in Care and Care Leavers. These strategies outline the corporate parenting responsibilities of Rotherham Council and wider partners.
- 1.3 There are currently 357 Care Leavers, aged 16 to 21, 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 until a Care Leaver reaches 21 years old and support beyond where required.
- 1.4 The Strategy demonstrates how partners across Rotherham will work together to ensure the needs of Care Leavers are met. The six priorities have been selected as the key areas for development in Leaving Care services and in the offer to Care Leavers. These young people have often experienced adversity and as such, are more vulnerable than their peers, who have not had care experience. As such, the Strategy must outline priorities which meet the complex needs of all Care Leavers and determine how these needs may be met over the next three years.
- 1.5 The priorities set out in the Leaving Care Strategy are;
 - Strategic Priority One: Family and Connections.
 - Strategic Priority Two: Safe and Affordable Homes.
 - Strategic Priority Three: Education, Training and Employment.
 - Strategic Priority Four: Health and Wellbeing.
 - Strategic Priority Five: Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People.
 - Strategic Priority Six: Engagement and Participation.

The Strategy outlines what the Council and its partners will do and how success will be measured under each priority.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 This Leaving Care Strategy as a standalone document is the first of its kind in Rotherham and was a recommendation of a Peer Review undertaken in March 2024. The consideration of Good and Outstanding Local Authorities offer to Care Leavers has confirmed that having a bespoke Care Leaver Strategy is best practice. This strategy compares well to other examples across the Care Leaver landscape. Corporate Parenting responsibilities are taken seriously by Rotherham Council and its partners, and it is recognised that there should be greater development of the Leaving Care Service over the next few years. Leaving Care strategic and operational service plans have been devised to track the progress of development work and these align with the Leaving Care Strategy priorities.
- 2.2 The key achievements within Leaving Care Services, over recent years, are as follows:
- Improved placement sufficiency through dedicated 16 plus Supported Accommodation and linked dispersed properties.
 - Improved safe and affordable homes for Care Leavers through effective relationships with providers in Rotherham and neighbouring local authorities.
 - Destination and permanence planning for all Care Leavers.
 - Stability of the workforce and the experience of the Personal Advisors.
- 2.3 Initially, the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board, alongside performance clinics, will review the progress of the Leaving Care Strategy, 2024-2027 and of the service plans which sit alongside this document. Progress reports will be provided to the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board every six months. These will include metrics used to measure performance and quality, such as performance data around key areas and audit outcomes in respect of quality.
- 2.4 Quality assurance and performance data will be utilised to review the progress of the Strategy and the impact for young people on a monthly basis.
- 2.5 Activity will continue to engage partner agencies, officers, and elected members in corporate parenting responsibilities. This will include exploring a covenant for Care Leavers to determine what agencies can offer to support young people to achieve success.
- 2.6 The Council is committed to ensuring that all Care Leavers needs are met and that they are supported to achieve their aspirations and transition successfully to adulthood. The proposed Strategy and governance arrangements will support to achieve this.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 Cabinet is asked to approve the Leaving Care Strategy 2024-2027. Approval of this Strategy will ensure that the development of the Leaving Care service will progress. This will also ensure that the Strategy and associated service plans are carried out, which will improve the experience of and support to Care Leavers.
- 3.2 The alternative to this is to not approve the Strategy and retain the Corporate Parenting Strategy as the overarching plan for both Children in Care and Leaving Care

Services. This is not recommended due to the need to focus on improving services for Care Leavers.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 The development of this Strategy has involved a number of partner agencies across Rotherham, including health, education, commissioning, performance, legal services, and finance. The Care Leavers Forum is offering its views about the Strategy to enable these to be built into the specific service plans. The Care Leavers Forum will be asked to support the review of this plan.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 This new Strategy will cover the period 2024 – 2027.
- 5.2 The progress of this Strategy will be reviewed in various forums, including monthly performance clinics and boards and the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board.
- 5.3 The Strategy will be progressed upon approval from Cabinet in November 2024.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 There is no additional cost to implementing this Strategy, other than what is already set out in Children's Services budget. The hope is that implementing this Strategy will reduce the cost overall through more consistent and timely practice, which supports young people to destinations more swiftly.
- 6.2 There are no direct procurement implications associated with the recommendation detailed in this report. Where there is a need to engage Providers and Suppliers to support the delivery of the strategy, these must be procured in compliance with relevant procurement legislation (Public Contracts Regulations 2015 / Procurement Act 2023) and the Council's own Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 The Council has a duty to provide support to Care Leavers under the Children Act 1989 as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The proposals set out in this report will expand upon these duties.
- 7.2 Section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 provides that every Local Authority must publish information about services that Care Leavers will be offered to assist in preparing them for adulthood and independent living. The Leaving Care Strategy describes how the Rotherham MBC will meet its legal obligations to those young people leaving care. Therefore, there are no legal implications posed by the recommendation at 3.1.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 HR will continue to work with the Service to highlight apprenticeship opportunities that are available throughout RMBC.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 Implications to vulnerable children and young people are covered within the report.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 Equality and human rights are considered within the report.

11. Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 Any implications are included in Appendix 4 Carbon Impact Assessment

12. Implications for Partners

12.1 Implications for Partners are reflected in the report.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 These are referred to in the report.

14. Accountable Officers

Monica Green, Assistant Director Children's Services

Jane Wood, Head of Service Children in Care and Corporate Parenting

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

| | Named Officer | Date |
|--|----------------------|-------------|
| Chief Executive | Sharon Kemp OBE | 04/11/2024 |
| Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer) | Judith Badger | 22/10/2024 |
| Assistant Director, Legal Services (Monitoring Officer) | Phil Horsfield | 22/10/2024 |

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