

AGENDA ITEM

**REPORT TO CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE
SELECT COMMITTEE**

23 JANUARY 2019

**REPORT OF
DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

REPORTING-IN SCRUTINY REVIEW OF THE CARE LEAVERS LOCAL OFFER

SUMMARY

This report updates Committee on the progress of reporting in review of care leavers local offer. It includes detail of the new guidance and legislation outlining the duties for local authorities to support care leavers - to be known as the care leaver's local offer. It outline the current care leavers local offer and plans for the development of the care leaver's local offer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to agree the report.

BACKGROUND

1. This review was initiated to provide oversight of the proposals to develop the Stockton Care Leavers Local Offer.
2. It has been undertaken as a reporting-in review, via an initial report to Committee in November 2018 and a final report to be considered on 23 January.
3. The initial report set out the context for the work to develop the new care Leavers Offer, and an outline of the current position.
4. Members authorised further work on:
 - 1) Consultation and engagement with care leavers;
 - 2) The publication of the current offer as part of the refreshed Information Directory;
 - 3) Continued work to develop a new form of offer for publication in April 2019.

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY CONTEXT

5. The main legislation in respect of care leavers includes the Leaving Care Act (2000), The Children and Young People Act (2008), the 2013 cross - Government care leaver strategy, the 2014 Children and Families Act and The Children and Social Work Act 2017, all of which have gradually expanded the responsibilities of local authorities in supporting children and young people in care.
6. Young people who have been 'looked after' by the local authority and are care leavers are entitled to access care leaving services. These service entitlements were initially available for young people between the ages of 16 to 21 or 25 if they were in further education however the new legislation has increased the upper age limit to 25 regardless of whether the young person is in further education or not.
7. The term 'Care Leaver' relates to;
 - **Eligible children** (those children ages 16 or 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and continue to be so)
 - **Relevant children** (those aged 16 or 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 **and** who have left care)
 - **Former relevant children** (those aged between 18 and 25 who were previously eligible or relevant)
 - **Qualifying children** (those who left care after the age of 16 but had been in care less than 13 weeks since their 14th birthday or those who are relevant children but returned home for 6 months or more)
8. Depending on the above status these care leavers are entitled to certain level of services.
9. In July 2016 the Government published the Policy Briefing 'Keep on Caring; supporting Young People from Care to Independence' which outlined proposals to better support Care Leavers as they transition into adulthood and it emphasised the role of local authorities as corporate parents responsible for ensuring positive outcomes for young people. It focused on 5 key outcomes:
 - Young People leaving care are better prepared and supported to live independently
 - Improved access to education, employment and training
 - Care leavers should experience stability in their lives, and feel safe and secure
 - Improved access to health support
 - Care leavers should achieve financial stability
10. Provisions within The Children and Social Work Act 2017 which enhance local authorities duties that apply to looked after children and care leavers more recently came into force and the Government has published statutory guidance which sets out how these new duties should be implemented and the aim is to further improve support for looked after children especially those leaving care.
11. Section 1 of this act requires local authorities to have regard to a set of corporate parenting principles when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and care leavers.

12. These corporate parenting principles set out 7 fundamental needs for looked after children and care leavers as follows;
- To act in the best interests and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing of those children and young people
 - To encourage those children and young people to express their views wishes and feelings
 - To take into account the views wishes and feelings of those children and young people
 - To help those children and young people to gain access to and make best use of services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
 - To promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for those children and young people
 - For those children and young people to be safe and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work
 - To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.
13. In Stockton these principles have been incorporated into the new Strategy for children in, and leaving, our care which was agreed by Cabinet in 2018.
14. Section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires local authorities to consult on and publish a local offer for their care leavers. The local offer should provide information about all the services and support that is available to care leavers in the local area where they live. It should include information about their statutory entitlements as well as any discretionary support that the local authority might choose to provide.
15. Section 3 of this act has introduced a new duty on a local authorities which requires them to offer Personal Adviser support to all care leavers up to age 25.
16. This includes care leavers who return to the local authority at any point between the ages of 21 up to 25 and request Personal Adviser support even if they have previously indicated that they didn't want it.

THE CARE LEAVERS LOCAL OFFER

17. The Government's statutory guidance sets out details of the services and support that should be included in a local offer. The support on offer should come from all local authority departments and partner agencies (not just children services) and should detail the services that may assist care leavers in or moving to, adulthood and independent living in relation to the following:
- a. Health and wellbeing;** this will include services that teach about, support and enable good health and wellbeing. It should include links to, or information about, universal health services that might be particularly relevant to care leavers, as well as specific health and wellbeing services targeted at them.
 - b. Relationships;** having strong and supportive relationships is crucially important for care leavers as they move to independent adult life. Local authorities will want to consider the services and/ or support that is available to help care leavers develop and maintain positive social networks and to understand what positive relationships look like.

- c. **Education and training;** Care leavers should be supported to access appropriate education or training that will enable them to fulfil their goals. This will include the statutory support available to care leavers, such as the £2,000 bursary for care leavers in higher education, as well as any other support from the local authority; and signpost to universal information such as careers advice and financial support for young people.
- d. **Employment;** this will include information to care leavers about general employment support such as careers support and links to local Job Centre Plus. Local authorities should also include any other employment support that they or partners deliver that is specifically available for care leavers, for example, any apprenticeships that the local authority offers, in particular where such opportunities are ring fences for care leavers.
- e. **Accommodation;** care leavers should be supported to access appropriate and suitable accommodation. The local authority should include relevant information about their Staying put policy, the support available from housing services and any other assistance that is available to care leavers, such as advice on maintaining a tenancy.
- f. **Participation in society;** this will include links to and information about activities, events or volunteering opportunities available in the local offer that care leavers can get involved in.

Developing consulting the format and publishing of the local offer

- 18. The local offer should be developed and published in consultation with care leavers and should be easily available and accessible to all care leavers in the local authority area. It should be made available in a number of formats including printed hard copies, on line digital copies and in different languages as appropriate. It should be made available to and in a way that is easily understood by, care leavers with additional needs
- 19. The precise arrangements for consulting care leavers and the format(s) that the local offer is available in are for local authorities to determine.

OUTCOMES FROM THE REVIEW

- 20. In consultation with a group of care leavers we have reviewed our existing local offer to consider if the current services and support on offer meet the requirements of the Government's Statutory Guidance.
- 21. The existing local offer is compliant with the legislation.
- 22. During this exercise some additional ideas developed from the young people and staff involved that may need the support of other departments and partner agencies.
- 23. The current local offer was already available to care leavers in the form of an information booklet however it also needed to be published in digital format and with that in mind care leavers have been involved in developing a site on the Stockton Information Directory (SID) and this is now available to care leavers. (There is still some development work ongoing on the content).
- 24. Appendix 1 outlines the current local offer and some of the ideas that came up for development as a result of the consultation with care leavers and staff and progress to date.

RECOMMENDATIONS

25. Recommendations are:

- a. Continue to engage with care leavers on the content of the local offer;
- b. Continue to develop the format of the offer on the Stockton Information Directory
- c. Work towards publication of the full offer by April 2019

CONTACT OFFICER: Jackie Ward, Service Manager Looked After Children and Complex Needs.