

**TITLE OF REPORT:** Case Study on Support to Care Leavers

**REPORT OF:** Caroline O'Neill Strategic Director, Care Wellbeing and Learning

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## Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the OSC's views on the provision on the support offered to care leavers and forward these views to the Looked After Children's Team

## Background

2. Every local authority has a statutory duty under the Children Leaving care Act 2000 to offer care leavers support advice and guidance. Gateshead publishes their current offer on the Council website, which outlines the services and support we offer our care leavers
3. Under the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the Government introduced the requirement for local authorities to publish a 'Local Care Leaver Offer', which outlines the services for care leavers available within the local authority area. This offer is a combination of statutory entitlements as well as how Gateshead and its partners can give over and above their statutory duty. In order to get the best possible offer we are currently working with the Strategic Director of Care, Wellbeing and Learning and the Chief Executive to hold a stakeholder event, involving external partners and Local businesses which will hopefully get partners to sign up to the local offer and make pledges for our young people. The Local Offer will be published in April 2018 and it is hoped we will have
  - Council tax exemption for care leavers up to the age of 25
  - Peer mentoring
  - Housing pathway with a range of options for young people
  - Improved employment, education and training offer from both within the council and from partners
4. An increasing focus is being placed on care leavers and the responsibility of Local Authorities to ensure they transition well into adulthood as nationally, young people leaving care have significantly poorer outcomes than their peers in relation to education, training and employment (EET). When young people enter care, some as late as 13 to 17 years of age, their educational attainment levels are often well behind those of same age young people in the general population and therefore when they Leave Care they need additional support from services.

5. Information is produced on a monthly basis from Care First and monitored by performance meetings with the Service Manager and Team Managers. This enables us to look at statistics and data in relation to our care leavers and to raise any concerns in relation to changes in data.
6. This is a key area of work for the Looked After Children's Service, as we want the best possible outcomes for our Care Leavers. The case study has therefore focused on
  - The role of a Corporate Parent
  - The role of the personal advisor
  - Pathway plan
  - Accommodation
  - Financial support
  - Education, employment and training
  - Identifying young people needing additional support

### **Role of Corporate Parent**

7. Gateshead have always been very clear about their role as Corporate Parents for Looked After Children and Care Leavers and have always had high aspirations for a child in care or care leaver as any good parent would have for their own child. It means providing them with the stability and support they need to make progress; and helping them to access new opportunities and experiences that inspire them to set ambitious goals for themselves. It means celebrating their successes, but also recognising that they will sometimes make mistakes and need help to get back on track. It also means supporting them to gain the skills and confidence to live independent lives, while letting them know that they have someone to call on for help if the going gets tough.
8. The Government has introduced a set of Corporate Parenting principles that require all departments within a local authority to recognise their role as corporate parents, and encourage them to look at the support and services they provide. The principles require corporate parents:
  - To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, 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 gain access to, and make the 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; and
  - To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

9. These principles are being shared with Councilors, directors and managers across services to ensure we can give our Looked After young people and care leavers the best possible opportunities

### **The role of the personal advisor**

10. Prior to the young person's sixteenth birthday a needs assessment will be carried out by the young person's social worker and a Personal Advisor will be allocated. The personal advisor will initially work alongside the young person's social worker attending Looked After Reviews and obtaining the views of the young person about their plan for the future and who will be responsible in supporting the young person. They produce a pathway plan for the young person and are responsible for reviewing and updating this.
11. Independent living skills will be promoted by the personal advisor with the young person making their way through the Independent Living Skills Booklet. This booklet not only educates and promotes, it allows the professionals working with the young person to assess their skills for adulthood.
12. When the young person turns 18 the personal advisor continues to work with them, ensuring they have the right support in place, coordinating their pathway plan and having contact with them every 8 weeks (as a minimum). This support used to end when a young person reached 21, however this now remains in place until the young person is 25 years old.
13. The personal advisor alongside the work around accommodation, education, employment and training will also work closely around the young person's health both physical and emotional wellbeing. If the young person has any outstanding needs with respect to their health they will support the young person to visit their GP or support them to attend the monthly health drop-in, which is co facilitated by the LAC Health Team. If the young person wishes to speak to someone around their emotional wellbeing, again the same route can be taken. The personal advisor can also refer the young person (with their permission) to North East Counselling Service for additional support for the young person.

### **Pathway Plans**

14. All Care Leavers have a Pathway plan, which considers the young persons need for support and assistance, based on previous assessments and LAC plans. The pathway plan sets out what they need and who will support them. This plan is reviewed every six months to ensure the care leaver is being supported in their transition from care. The pathway plan outlines
  - Accommodation
  - Practical life skills including money management
  - Education and training
  - Employment
  - Financial support
  - Specific support needs
  - Contingency plans for support if independent living breaks down

15. These elements are intended to provide a full package of support to the young person to enable them to make the transition from care to living independently. The young person's voice is key to the success of the pathway plan and they will be actively encouraged to attend the pathway plan review or have their views represented by a person of their choice or via MOMO.

## **Accommodation**

16. The Children Leaving Care Act 2000 imposes duties on Local Authorities to support care leavers to obtain suitable accommodation which should
- Avoid moving and disrupting young people who are settled
  - Assess young people's needs and prepare them for any move
  - Offer a choice of accommodation( where practicable)
  - Provide a support package to go with the accommodation
  - Have a contingency plan in case accommodation arrangements break down
17. Ensuring the right type of provision is available to all care leavers a new accommodation strategy has been developed between Children's services, commissioning and housing. This has been out to tender and the new model commences on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018. This will provide
- Emergency supported accommodation
  - A short term assessment unit
  - Medium term 24 hour supported accommodation with step down shared living and dispersed houses
  - Supported lodgings
  - Taster flats
18. There will be a multidisciplinary panel that will monitor all placements and coordinate planned moves. They will also evaluate the progress of this strategy. The Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Panel will feed into the multidisciplinary panel.
19. In Gateshead The Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Panel was established in April 2015 as a joint initiative between Housing Services and the Looked after Children's The joint vision is that all care leavers are corporately supported in their pathway to adulthood through provision of suitable accommodation that corresponds with their needs and wishes.
20. The aim of the Care Leavers Accommodation Panel is to:
21. Bring services together to have a joint response to the accommodation needs of care leavers.
- To enable care leavers to make smooth transitions by promoting positive rather than reactive planning.
  - To provide a range of accommodation with tenancy ready work suitable to the diverse needs of care leavers at different stages in the leaving care process and to give access to independent tenancies when required.

- To recognise that the pathway to independent living for some care leavers may be complex and to acknowledge that some care leavers may require a second or third chance at independent living and to support.
  - To ensure all young people leaving care have safe, permanent and affordable accommodation
22. This initiative is proving to be very successful and was recognised as being highly commended at the Local Government Awards in 2017
23. Accommodation choices available to the care leavers are;
- Staying Put
  - Supported Lodgings
  - Supported accommodation
  - Semi-supported accommodation
  - Taster flats
  - Own tenancy
24. The young person will receive support from their personal advisor when moving onto their preferred accommodation and they will get a visit 7 days after moving in to ensure things are going to plan.
25. Prior to the young person moving onto their preferred accommodation, they are offered a course facilitated by Learning & Skills; named, Financial Education.
26. This course consists of;
- Budgeting
  - Managing income and expenditure
  - Banking, saving and borrowing
  - Financial future employment
  - Debt Management
27. If a young person is going into supported accommodation or a taster flat they are referred through to 2 Way Tenancy Solutions who run a training programme which consists of;
- Managing a Tenancy
  - Living on your own
  - Keeping a Tenancy
  - Repairs
  - Budgeting
28. On completion of this course the young people will receive a microwave, toaster and kettle to assist them in setting up home. If the young person takes a taster flat or their own tenancy, they will also receive additional support from Housing, via a tenancy support worker. The young person will also be entitled to financial support up to £2,000 to set up their own home.

## **Financial support**

29. Gateshead Leaving Care Service has comprehensive financial procedures in place to support care leavers in EET. The focal point of the financial support is to assist care leavers who are combining having to live independently with either being employed or in training. For example care leavers receive monthly incentives for attending education, employment or training and the services ensures that they are not financially disadvantaged or penalized in relation to housing benefit or other entitlements. Support with utility bills during the winter months is also offered in recognition of the challenges some of our young people face.
30. Young people who are attending Higher Education receive financial assistance and support which is managed and administered appropriately by the Leaving Care Service. Young people in higher education are provided with accommodation during the holiday period whether this is via Staying Put arrangements or additional weeks within their accommodation at University.
31. The Leaving Care Service will support a young person continuing in a pathway of education and training until their 25th birthday, which complies with the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

## **Education, employment and training**

32. We have high aspiration and ambition for our young people therefore it is important that we support all of our young people in Employment, Education and Training. We work closely with REALAC whilst our young people are looked after. The Virtual School team promotes and supports the educational achievement of looked after children across all services and at every level of the authority, particularly with social workers, designated teachers and foster carers, to ensure that it is treated as a high priority. REALAC provides direct support to children, carers, social workers and schools in the following areas:
  - When a change of school is needed or there is at risk of school exclusion
  - With on-going educational support when a child is in between educational placements direct teaching time from our teacher is offered
  - Providing a wide range of training opportunities to support and promote the educational achievement of our children
  - Support when an appropriate alternative placement is required
  - Offers of work experience placements (Pathways2Work) during the holidays
  - Support with any aspect of ensuring all looked after children have an up to date Personal Education Plans (PEPs)
  - One to one tuition to support educational achievement
  - Support with the Special Educational Needs process
33. Before going into the world of work the young person can access the Pathways to Work programme facilitated by REALAC which offers young people the opportunity to experience work for a couple of weeks before committing to their long term plan.

34. Between the age of 16yrs – 18yrs, the young person will be supported into employment, education or training. The personal advisor and social worker will assess the needs of the young person in an effort to work towards a clear pathway for the young person which is documented within the pathway plan.
35. Up to and beyond the age of 18yrs the young person can be referred to Learning & Skills who offer career information sessions, CV Design, Mock Interview Skills. The young person will also be assessed and the result of the assessment will be offered a Study Programme, Traineeship or Apprenticeship.
36. Study Programme;
  - A 1 year programme covering English, Maths, ICT Vocational Skills, Employability Skills
37. Traineeship;
  - A 5 Month Programme for young people who are not apprenticeship ready
38. Apprenticeships;
  - 12-18 month paid employment for 30hrs a week, where the young person receives a qualification as well as experience of working.
39. We are also working in partnership with Gateshead College who will deliver a comprehensive range of industry related workshops alongside a Certificate in Occupational Studies for the Workplace. Young people will receive guidance and support which will enhance their opportunity to move into employment.
40. If the young person is not ready for work and needs additional support, the personal advisor can refer to Building Better Opportunities – Wise Steps where young people will receive one to one support from a job coach for up to 18 months. Together the job search and the young people will focus on removing any barriers to work through social inclusion activities, life skills, confidence building and skills development. Activities will also include ICT training and personal money management.

### **Identifying young people needing additional support**

41. The service acknowledges that there has been an issue with young people leaving care refusing to engage in employment, education and training and have taken proactive steps to try and improve the statistics and outcomes for care leavers. The Education, Employment and Training (EET) panel was set up in 2015 and is chaired by the Looked After Children and Young Peoples Service. The panel meets on a monthly basis is made up of representatives from, REALAC and Local further and Higher Education Providers. The panel looks at all looked after children and young people from the age of 15 years through to Care Leavers up to the age of 25 years and rate them as being Red, Amber or Green. The panel identifies gaps in education, employment and training for the young people that are at risk of becoming NEET and these young people are rated as red. This ensures that additional support and resources are identified and plans put in place to support young people back into EET

42. Delivering courses and training specific to care leavers enabling them to access EET is a challenge that the service is striving to meet. Progress is being made in this area as REALAC have tailored training or offered specific work experience in a supportive environment for young people who have found it challenging to sustain mainstream courses. External training providers such as Talent Match, and Generation North East optimises the support available to our young people and reduces the risk of NEET
43. There are also regular meetings being held with partners looking at apprenticeships for Looked After children and care leavers, discussing the need for increased apprenticeship provision within the council. This work has enabled 4 LAC and Care Leavers to recently take up apprenticeships within the council and it is envisaged that this offer will increase over the next 12 months.
44. Learning and Skills are working proactively with us to determine the skills and abilities of our young people and are developing appropriate pathways into both council and external apprenticeship providers, with the acceptance and understanding that some of our young people will need additional support to succeed.

#### **Issues the OSC might want to consider**

45. In light of the information provided the OSC might wish to consider whether it is satisfied with the level of support being offered to Care Leavers. When addressing this question the OSC might wish to take into account the following
  - Are we working proactively as corporate parents for Care Leavers
  - Have we got the right involvement from our partners
  - Are we promoting positive outcomes for Care leavers
  - Are we offering the right support to the NEET cohort

#### **Recommendations**

46. The views of the OSC are sought on:-
  - Whether it is satisfied with the level of support Care leavers are receiving in Gateshead
  - Whether it wishes to receive a further report on the support we offer care leavers

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