

TITLE OF REPORT: Support to care experienced young people

REPORT OF: Caroline O'Neill, Strategic Director Children, Adults and Families

Purpose of the Report

1. To update the Corporate Parenting Board on how the service supports care experienced young people (care leavers). With a special focus on the impact of the COVID -19 pandemic and other issues facing them, such as increasing living costs, access to health services and accessing education employment and training.
2. The report will also look at some current and future development areas.

Background

3. The report to OSC from September 2017 set out the developments made around our care leavers charter and the principles by which we seek to support care experienced young people. These principles remain at the center of what we do to support Gateshead's care experienced young people and drives forward what we seek to offer them and how we support them in their transitions from young people to young adults.
4. Our offer to care leavers is called Gateshead's got your back and information about this is available through the care leavers app. Details about the offer can be found via this link [Gateshead's Local Offer for care leavers - Gateshead Council](#). The core principles are.
 - Respect us
 - Listen to us
 - Work with us
 - Believe in us
 - Hold aspirations for us
 - Make sure we have somewhere to call home
 - Don't forget about us

How we monitor our support to our care experienced young adults

5. The care experienced service (Leaving Care Team) consists of 1 Team manager who is a qualified social worker, 1 Senior Personal Advisor and 7 full time equivalent Personal Advisors. This means that the average case load for a worker is 14 young people. All Personal advisors are also allocated to children in

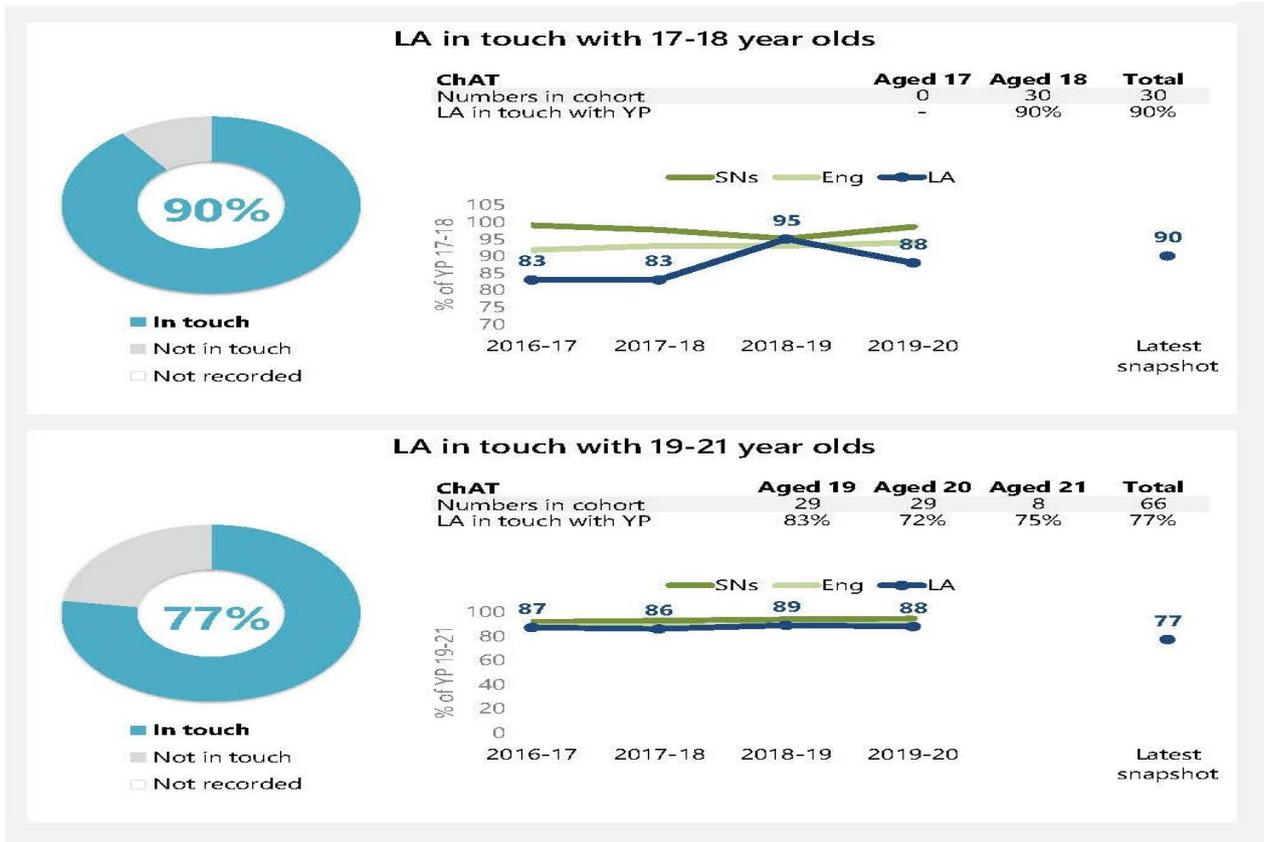
our care at the age of 16. They co work these cases until they become the young person primary worker at 18.

6. There are currently 223 young people open to the service, however 117 of these are open for support and guidance as they are aged over 21 and no longer allocated a full-time worker. These young adults are supported through the duty worker system as and when they require it and can be reallocated a Personal Advisor if they have ongoing support needs.
7. The structure of the team means that workers are able to provide young people with a responsive, person centered service built on relational practice models that ensure that young people can access support as and when they need to.
8. As a service we receive daily data from the performance team. This data covers the key performance areas to make sure that all our young people are getting the service they are entitled to from their Personal Advisors. These areas are, contact with the young person, case supervision, a live active pathway plan on file and case activity over the last 30 days. Receiving this data daily helps us to identify and rectify any issues quickly and this makes sure there is robust management and service management oversight.

Support to Care Leavers at the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic

9. During the pandemic we offered increased contact with our care leavers and the Personal Advisors ensured they maintained regular telephone contact. This was often weekly or daily for our more vulnerable young people.
10. Young people told us they enjoyed this increased contact and felt they got to know their Personal Advisors better. During the COVID 19 pandemic the Department for Education (Dfe) asked local authorities to contact all the children and young people that they are involved with every 4 weeks. The service met this challenge and have consistently contact all their care experienced young adults at least every 4 weeks.
11. Care experienced young people tell us that they enjoyed Personal Advisors ringing for a chat to see how they were. They also found that their Personal Advisors were more available during lockdown, and they were able to contact them more easily if they had a problem, they needed help with as Personal Advisors were not travelling to visits or meetings as frequently.
12. Whilst we continued to offer a duty service, we found that young people were no longer accessing this in the same way that they had been in the past, and Personal Advisors were able to offer crisis support to the young people they worked with more easily. Whilst most contact was by telephone, Personal Advisors also met young people to go for walks regularly where this was felt necessary. Doorstep visits were made where there were any concerns for a young person's welfare, and they needed to be seen.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	YTD 2021/22
Number of care leavers we are in touch with	111	115	117	114

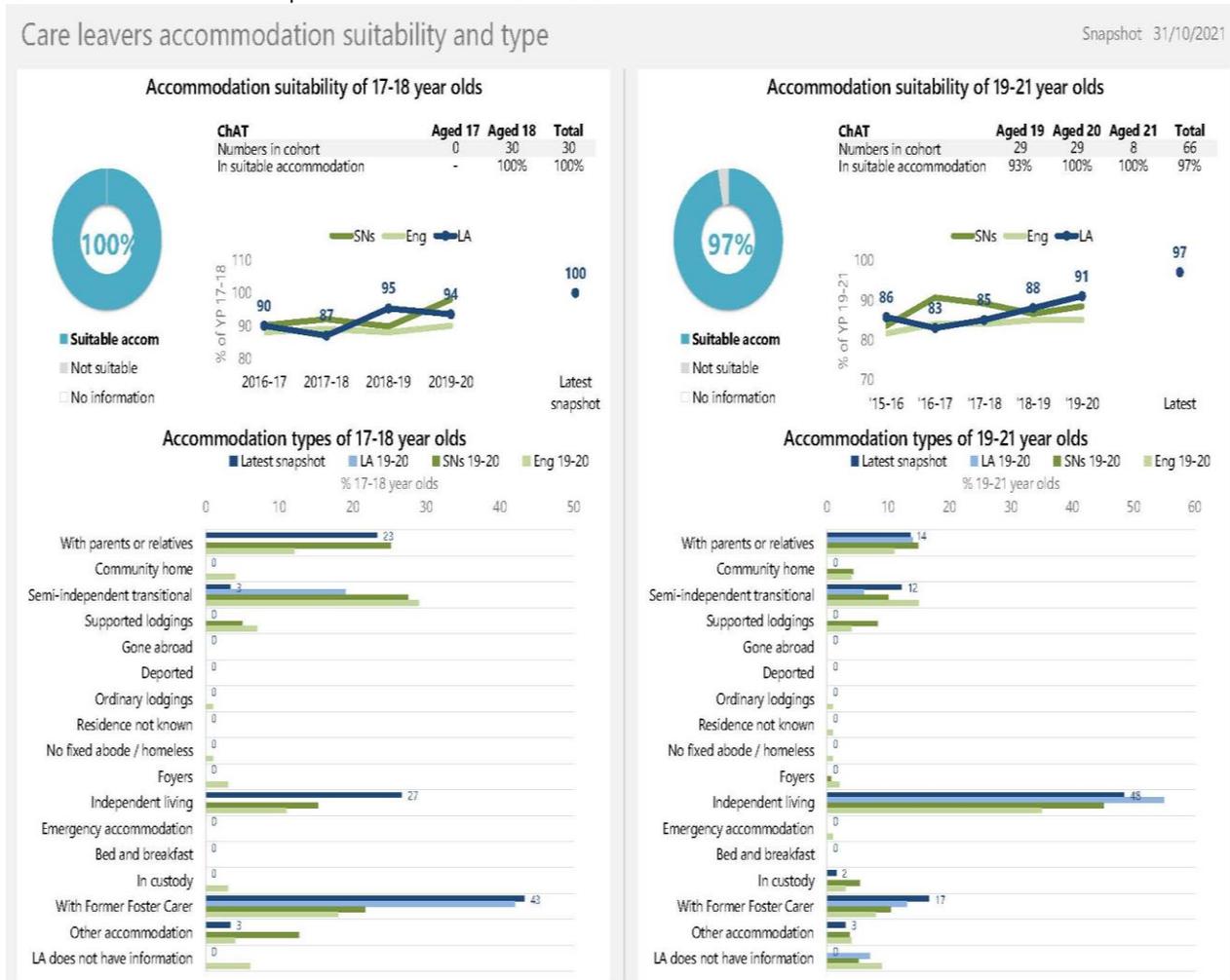


Accommodation

13. Without young people having somewhere appropriate to live, it is unlikely they would be able to sustain education, employment, or training opportunities, this is particularly true for young people exiting the care system who often have limited support available to them, outside of the professional that care for and support them. Improving the quality and choice of housing is crucial to improving the stability and engagement of care leavers in education, employment, and training.
14. Currently accommodation for young people leaving care on their 18th birthday is predominantly with their foster carers. This is a positive step in the right direction from previous practice and ensures that young people move on when the time is right for them, not just because they are suddenly seen as being an adult once they are 18 years old.
15. As can be seen from the graphs below Gateshead offers 'Staying Put' placements to a much higher proportion of young people on their 18th birthday (43%) compared to both statistical neighbors and the national average.
16. Other young people who are not going into 'Staying Put' arrangements with a foster carer are referred to the Supported Accommodation and Independent living Service (SAILS) Panel. We have reviewed this process over the last 12 months along with the staying put process. Young people are now referred into the SAILS Panel at 17 and a half if they will not be staying put. This gives panel, young people, and their care teams the time needed to make plans for post 18 yrs accommodation as well as identifying what level of support they will need.

17. Currently 98.2% of care experienced young people are living in suitable accommodation. There are only 2 young people deemed as not being in suitable accommodation. This relates to two young men who are in custody.

*Lates available statistical comparative data runs from 2016-2020



Financial Support

18. Gateshead's service to our care experienced young people offer a wide range of critical financial support. The primary focus of the financial support is to assist our young people who are living independently and either in employment, training, or education.

19. The support we offer includes.

- Weekly living allowance of £60 per week where benefits are not in place or the young person is not entitled to claim benefits.
- A winter fuel allowances is available to young people living in independent accommodation between the months of November and March. This is paid at £30 per month.
- Where young people are living semi-independently or independently and are engaged in employment, education or training, incentive payments are paid of up to £70 per month.
- For each young person who completes a year of full-time or equivalent study, an education bonus of £25 is paid.

- Young People in further education will receive up to £6000 per year to assist with accommodation or education costs.
- Young people aged between 16yrs – 19yrs attending training courses can claim a bursary of £60 per week.
- Where young people are moving into independent accommodation a setting up home allowance is available up to £2000 to support with this transition and purchase the items, they need to set up their first home.
- The service recognises a young person's birthday by giving them a birthday allowance of £20 between the age of 18 to 20 years with a final birthday payment of £50 at 21 years

20. A recent review of payments and financial support to our care experienced young people has been undertaken due to the withdrawal of the £20 Universal Credit uplift, the increase in energy prices and the rate of inflation currently at around 4.2%.

21. Initially it is agreed that an increase of £10 in the winter fuel payment for the 20 young people who live independently (increased from £20 per month to £30 per month for the 5 winter months) will be paid.

22. The Care Experienced Services complies with Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 in the financial assistance and support offered to people leaving care and will support a young person continuing in a pathway of education and training until their 25th birthday.

Education, employment and training

23. The covid pandemic has impacted on the number of our care experienced young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Many job losses were due to young people being employed on zero-hours contracts and 16–17-year-old young people who were preparing to leave care who were engaged in training, as some struggled to work remotely or attend online classes. This has led to a higher rate of young people disengaging from courses.

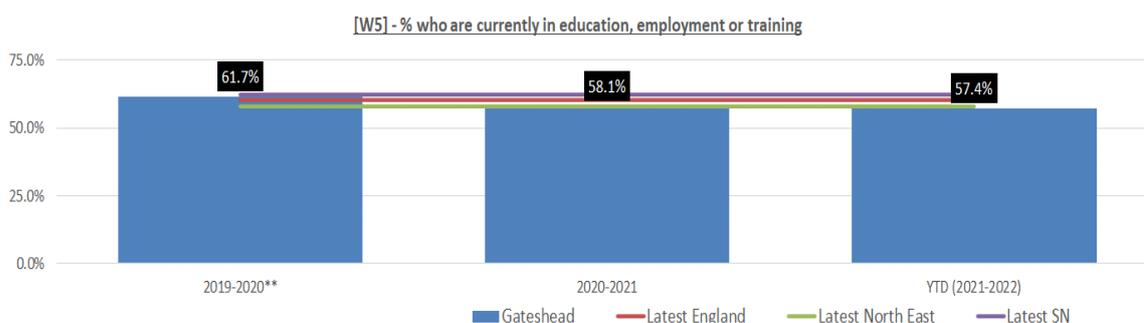
24. Work has been undertaken to address this with colleagues from the Education, Employment and Training (EET) panel continuing to meet monthly to monitor care experienced young people's progress, their plans, and the difficulties they face. Young people who are NEET or who are at risk of becoming NEET are discussed and options and interventions for them considered. Plans are made to address these issues and provide appropriate opportunities for these young people.

25. EET panel have worked to ensure the correct membership sits on the panel and the service have links with local colleges and training providers to monitor learner's progress. The service is then able to link in with social workers and Personal Advisors to address any identified issues.

26. The service links in with the Virtual school to identify work experience opportunities for care experienced young people. The service has worked with all Directorates within the Council to improve the apprenticeship offer for our care experienced young people and Personal Advisors have worked with training providers to support applications.

27. Links have been made with the Care Leavers Covenant and Gateshead Council have signed up to the membership as a whole council approach. This work is in the early stages and will explore the benefits of membership and EET opportunities available through covenant partnerships. Here is a link to the care leavers covenant [Home - Care Leaver Covenant \(mycovenant.org.uk\)](https://mycovenant.org.uk).

28. The NEET figures are beginning to decrease with 63.2% of care leavers being in some form of EET in September this year. This shows that the decrease seen during the pandemic is being turned round as learners can attend courses in person and there are increased employment opportunities.



29. The service was also successful in securing 3 posts for young ambassadors roles and these have been successfully recruited to, all of the candidates are care experienced young people 18yrs and over. They will take up posts soon and will be working for 6 hours per week. Their role will be varied and will look to influence our practice and service delivery, not only in the care experienced service but across Children's Services.

Health and Wellbeing

30. During the pandemic the NHS estimates that there was an increase in the number of adults experiencing some form of depression from 1 in 10 to 1 in 6. Statistically care experienced young people are overrepresented within mental health services and they tend to experience poorer health outcomes in general.

31. As a response to this the CCG and the local authority work alongside third sector organisation Digital Voice to consult care experienced young people around their experiences of using health services, the animation they produced can be accessed through the following link <https://youtu.be/H0aKQGtQ7KM> .

32. The animation was shown at a panel event which included the young people involved. The young people shared valuable information about the barriers they experience in accessing health services. In response Newcastle Gateshead CCG and Gateshead are working on a pilot project to supply a cohort of care experienced young people with bus passes, enabling them to travel and access health services and maintain relationships with those people close to them. A project will be evaluated.

33. The panel event can be accessed through the following link <https://youtu.be/YZE7PZGFI8A> . This is an excellent example of experts by experience influencing practice and service delivery.

34. There has also been intensive work carried out, alongside internal and external partners to support with the transition of young people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Learning Difficulties (LD). This work will ensure that all young people who have additional needs including those in our care, have the right plans, service provision and accommodation for when they become adults. This work has included the Transitions Team within Adult Services, the Children with Disabilities Team, the Clinical Commission Group (CCG), Continued Health Care (CHC) and Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust. Discussions have led to the development of an Ages & Stages document which provides clear guidance to staff on how to support young people, their families, and their carers with transitions to adulthood. This work will be reflected in our local Tri.x procedures.

Issues for Corporate Parenting Board to consider

35. Given the information contained within this report CPP may want to consider the level of support offered to care experienced young people and the following

- The current financial offer to care experienced young people and the review that will be conducted
- Support to care experienced young people in accessing training, education, and employment and how they are supported with this
- Whether the board would welcome a further update on the pilot supporting care experienced young people to access health appointments and maintain relationships with those closest to them

Recommendations

36. The Corporate Parenting Board is asked to: -

- Note the contents of the report
- Consider the progress and the level of support Care leavers are receiving in Gateshead
- Acknowledge whether the board would welcome a further report on the support offer care leavers

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