

**TITLE OF REPORT: Benchmarking the Care Experienced Service**


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**1. Purpose of the Report**

2. To seek the views of the Corporate Parenting Board on the completion of the benchmarking exercise in relation to the care experienced young people's service and the offer for them in Gateshead. To also seek the views of the Corporate Parenting Board on the service improvements suggested as an outcome of this benchmarking exercise.

**3. Background**

4. As part of our work to understand whether care experienced young people in Gateshead felt prepared to leave care, we completed the Self-Assessment Tool from the Ofsted Report. This document was completed with staff from the Leaving Care Team as well as one care experienced young person from Gateshead. We had planned for two other young people to complete this piece of work with us, but due to unforeseen circumstances they were not able to attend.
5. The Leaving Care team manager, senior personal adviser and a care experienced young person met to go through the self-assessment checklist together. We considered how Gateshead compared on each point, and if there was anything more, we could do to develop in each area. The young person contributed their views, drawing on their experience, but also considered the experience of young people in different settings such as children's homes and moving on to independent living.
6. The Self-Assessment Tool is attached in appendix 1
7. **Local Offer:**
8. We compared Local Offer's for Gateshead, Newcastle, Sunderland, South Tyneside, North Tyneside and Darlington.
9. We used Gateshead's Local Offer as a baseline and then highlighted which other Local Authority's offer the same. Our idea was this would help us to review our offer and also look at possible areas that we needed to develop in relation to both our local offer but also support to young people moving into adulthood.

	Gateshead	Newcastle	Sunderland	S/Tyneside	N/Tyneside	Darlington
<b>Accommodation Financial Support:</b>						
Council Tax Exemption	x	x	x	x	x	x
Setting Up Home	£2000	£2000	£2000	£2300	£2000	£2000

Allowance						
Starter Pack (first home)	x			x		
TV License	1 <sup>st</sup> TV license			1 <sup>st</sup> TV License		
Winter Fuel	x			x		x
<b>EET Financial Support:</b>						
HE Finance (Virtual School)	£2000	£2000	£2000	£2000	£2000	£2000
HE Accommodation Costs	Max £6000	x	Max £6000	x	x	x
EET Incentive	x			x		
<b>Health:</b>						
Leisure Pass	Free	Discounted		Free	Discounted	
Health Passport	x	x	x	x	x	x
<b>Other financial Support:</b>						
Birthday Allowance	x	x	x	x	x	x
Christmas Allowance	x	x	x	x	x	x
Emergency financial assistance	x	x	x	x	x	x

## 10. Proposal

11. As a result of this benchmarking exercise, we considered a range of areas where services could be focussed and improved. These are set out in the subheadings below.

## 12. Taster Flats

13. As part of our service improvement and developing our offer, the Leaving Care Team have worked closely with Gateshead Housing to develop a Taster Flat scheme. This will allow young people who are aged 17 the opportunity to have a taste of living independently. The young people will move into a Taster Property for a period of 6 weeks and within this time they will receive a tight support package from their Carers, Residential care staff, Social Worker, and Personal Adviser. The young people will receive a weekly living allowance which they will be supported to budget for utilities, food and travel which will replicate their financial responsibilities when living independently.

14. The taster flat experience will help prepare young people to understand the level of responsibility of living in their own property, and understand the practicalities of living alone, as well as some of the challenges such as loneliness. It is hoped this experience will help young people make a more informed decision about their future, help them prepare for independent living and may encourage more young people to consider alternative options to moving into independence, such as staying put. This idea was shared with us by Darlington's Care Leavers Team and highlighted as a strength in their Ofsted focused visit in October 2021.

15. The Taster properties can also be used when they are not occupied by Personal Adviser's to undertake preparation for independence work with young people between the ages 16-18. Tasks such as shopping on a budget, batch cooking, changing a plug, changing a light bulb etc, fire safety, home security and lots of other topics.

16. This offer will not require any additional resource as it will use one of the existing taster flats already allocated to the service. This will mean that this offer reduces from 30-29 flats and the effective use of this will be constantly reviewed.

## **17. Education employment and Training**

18. The Leaving Care Team have worked closely with the AIG team, Learning and Skills and the Workforce Development Team to look at supporting care experienced young people to access positions within the Council. Gateshead are in the process of developing work experience and traineeship opportunities for care experienced young people. These developments are currently ongoing and work is being led by the Apprenticeship Co-Ordinator alongside the services areas mentioned, the virtual school and the care experienced young people's team, this is being monitored through the EET panel. This is outside of the current offer for work experience for Children in our care during school holidays. Gateshead currently guarantee an interview for care experienced young people who meet the essential criteria for their apprenticeship opportunities.
19. An area for progression from this would be to guarantee interviews to care experienced young people regardless of meeting the essential criteria, as we have identified that GCSE's in Maths and English are a barrier to our care experienced young people applying for the apprenticeship, but they could work towards their Maths and English alongside their Apprenticeship once in post. Discussions around this are underway with The Apprenticeship Co-Ordinator, for some apprenticeships this is already the case.

## **20. Health**

21. The Leaving Care Team have been working closely with our partners in Health and the CCG around funding opportunities. We consulted with a group of care experienced young people about what they see as gaps in provision and how some additional funding from health would be best spent.
22. A considerable proportion of the young people we spoke to (94%) requested support from a mental health / counsellor based within the Care Experienced young people's team that they could have regular access to. They felt this would help them access support in a timely manner (rather than waiting weeks or months for an appointment). They could receive fortnightly or monthly appointments with one worker who knows their story/background and would not have to keep reliving the experience with different people.
23. They felt the professional should have knowledge of the issues faced by care experienced young people such as trauma, loss, abandonment, attachment, relationships, and low self-esteem as often other services do not understand these issues. They also mentioned they would be understanding of substance misuse as often other Mental Health services will not work with individuals with substance misuse difficulties. This often leads to young people falling between gaps in services and not receive the right help, support, or intervention.
24. Personal Advisers within the team agreed that a Mental health experienced professional within the team would support the young people but could also offer some clinical supervision to PA's to support their work with the young people. Again, this is a model operating in Darlington and this was again praised as an example of good practice by Ofsted in their recent focussed visit. The possibility of a Community Psychiatric Nurse having some time within the service is part of ongoing discussions with the CCG and other service developments across children's services that are going to be on stream by early 2023.

25. Alternative therapies were also suggested by the young people. One of the young people has been attending a local community farm which they feel has had a huge benefit on their mental health and wellbeing, and they would like to see more activities like this for Care Experienced young people.
26. The young people stated they would like to see regular outings to various places as this would support their mental health and wellbeing. They mentioned activities such as going for a walk in the hills, youth club/drop-in type activities, trips to visit places their peers may experience but they may not get the opportunity to do for financial reasons e.g. local tourist attractions.
27. Cooking programmes were also suggested, and the young people spoke fondly of previous experiences of this and the skills and positive experience they had.

## **28. Programme of activities**

29. As a result of the above consultation, we are currently linking with partner agencies to plan a programme of activities for young people to get involved in over the year. This will include sporting activities such as football and walks, as well as practical activities such as cookery and photography groups.
30. We are also looking to Gateshead Workforce Development to deliver some formal qualifications such as Health and Safety, Food Hygiene Courses to contribute towards their skills and qualifications.

## **31. Travel Pilot**

32. A group of care leavers from Gateshead took part in a Digital Me Project and created a film to highlight some of the issues and barriers faced by care experienced young people in the region. One of the barriers identified was young people living independently in their own tenancy were not able to afford the cost of travel to get out of the house, and this included to attend essential appointments such as those related to their health (GP, CPN, Therapy, Hospital etc).
33. Research shows that care experienced young people have greater mental health needs than other young people ([Mentalhealth.org.uk](http://Mentalhealth.org.uk)) due to adverse childhood experiences. Research also shows that people living alone are more likely to experience loneliness and other mental health problems ([Mind.org.uk](http://Mind.org.uk)).
34. The Care Experienced young people's team worked closely with partners from the CCG to secure funding of £45k to support travel for care experienced young people throughout the region.
35. Gateshead currently has 104 young people open to the Team. Approximately 65 of these young people live independently in the community in their own tenancy. Many of these young people do not have family, friends, or support networks outside of professionals and travelling via public transport is a luxury they cannot afford to prioritise.
36. The Travel Pilot will support a percentage of the young people living independently by offering these young people free/discounted travel within the region for a specific period (6-12 months).
37. The care experienced young people would apply to be part of the pilot. Applications would be considered based on the young persons, circumstances, health, and emotional wellbeing needs. The young people selected would be asked to complete a

questionnaire to gather their views on their current circumstances / barriers and the impact of not affording travel. The PA's would continue to maintain regular contact with the young people over the period they had the free/discounted travel. At the end of the trial period, they would complete an evaluation to measure the difference having access to free/discounted travel has made to their life, mental health, and emotional wellbeing. They service management and the CCG are waiting for a meeting with Nexus to agree the cost of the passes and then this scheme will commence.

38. The feedback and evaluation will be used to support requests for partner organisations offering free/discounted travel as part of their "Corporate Parent" responsibility to care leavers and could contribute to regional work undertaken in the future.

### **39. Recommendations**

40. The Corporate Parenting Board is asked to consider this report and agree its proposals.

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